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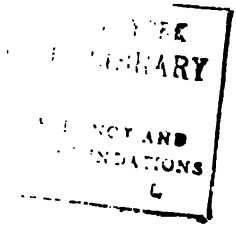
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What Never Dies.

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"'I order you to go away tomorrow!'"

Page 119

Edition de Luxe

THE WORKS OF

Oscar Wilde

What Never Dies

A romance, by Barbey D'Aurevilly

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH BY
SEBASTIAN MELMOTH
(OSCAR WILDE)

Illustrated

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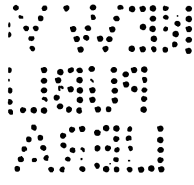

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FOREWORD.

If pity, the sweet and desolate pity exhaled in every line of the poem entitled "The Ballad of Reading Gaol," could have softened the wasted, wandering life of him who elected to be called Sebastian Melmoth, and paved the arduous, almost impossible, road whereon the Sisyphus-like task of regeneration was to have been attempted, it happily cannot be gainsaid that in Paris, the city of light and learning, there was no lack of heartfelt commiseration showered upon the ill-fated Napoleon of epigram. And pure and honest wielders of the pen, men with talent and position, albeit of another race and speaking another tongue, did not disdain to welcome the solitary giant, bent beneath the weight of former vice and perversion, accumulated by his own hand, self-murdered by the miserable mania that had seized and gripped him fast, despite the efforts of his reasoning self.

In all men, but more especially in those of strongly developed intellect, there are two beings,

eternally disputing and never in harmony, and yet one cannot live without the other, and each reacts upon the other. One is all logical and discriminating, presiding over the easel, the writing desk, the house of law or justice, and the other is made up of sensuality and impulsion. Such are the two halves of our miserable selves. Happy the male who can govern his passions, and is sufficiently conscious of his weaknesses to be able to avoid the dangers they carry in their wake.

"In all men's hearts a slumbering swine lies low," says the French poet; so come ye, whose porcine instincts have never been awakened, or, if rampant, successfully hidden, and hurl the biggest, sharpest stones you can lay your hands on at your wretched, degraded, humiliated brother, *who has been found out.*

When the history of modern French literature is impartially written, it is to be hoped that the Gallic movement of generous sympathy and revolt, in the face of the terrible punishment and fearful expiation in a foreign land of the faults of a man of genius, will be faithfully chronicled. Then credit will be given to the men of letters who tried to lighten the heavy days and make him forget his sorrows, if only for an hour.

The wanderer never complained. He lived in the glorious past, waiting until the pressure of the deadly present should have terminated its crushing task, and stifled his body as it had already done his soul; for future he felt there was none for him.

So why work or labour at pages of manuscript that he knew no publisher would dare to put upon the open market? Some desultory leaves, now lost and scattered, were the only fruits that matured on the blasted tree, and among them the translation of Barbey d'Aurevilly's impassioned novel, *"Ce Qui ne Meurt Pas"*—"What Never Dies"—the gospel of infinite pity. It so struck the excommunicated Melmoth, the daily recipient of the warmest and kindest compassion, that he never rested until his pen, growing facile as of old for one brief, lucid moment, had transformed the tortured, lurid prose of the romantic Frenchman into the polished, chosen phraseology of "Dorian Grey."

The story of strange passion exercised a weird fascination over the mind of Sebastian Melmoth, and the work, well worthy of perusal in its original form, becomes all the more entrancing by reason of the knowledge of the translator's talent.

It is difficult to praise the poet and at the same

time blame the man. We forget the sin when we remember the end, and shudder to think that he is perhaps even now not at rest in the Parisian cemetery, so far away as to discourage the pilgrim, and not allow an echoing prayer to reach him. No criticism of his posthumous work will awake or lull him. Now and again, perchance, some scandalous breeze will waft his own real name over the forgotten tomb, the shadow of an insult, the ghost of a jeering affront.

Who could think that one so despised by a merciless world had in happier times as admirably caught and sustained the blasé, cynical, paradoxical style of modern society of the special class as did Dean Swift during the eighteenth century in his "Polite Conversation."

Not only did he think in epigrams, he almost seemed to dream them. But an intellectual existence cannot be sustained by epigrams only, and it is no secret that many of his detractors found fault with his poems. Knowing this, when ostracised, declassed and forsaken, he found in France a few moments of forgetfulness in wrestling with the thorny, prickly prose of the great French master of the romantic school. The translation of Bar-

bey's throbbing tale is a *tour de force,* which none but the wretched writer could have made presentable to the English reader.

Let those who can feel nothing but disgust for the erring Sebastian Melmoth, and who have no pity in their hearts, evoke a little charity for his last brilliant effort during the monotony of an atrocious and mummified existence, when the poet called each day on death to come and claim him out of the squalid, narrow room of the struggling students' furnished hotel. And if naught but ill can be spoken of him, surely it would be as well to be mute and carve out his epitaph in his own words, where resounds the honest cry of a remorseful soul, brimming over with bitter anguish:

"And there, till Christ call forth the dead,
In silence let him lie;
No need to waste the foolish tear,
Or heave the windy sigh;
The man had killed the thing he loved,
And so he had to die."

WHAT NEVER DIES.

FIRST PART.

I.

In some parts of Lower Normandy—and especially in the Cotentin peninsula—there are landscapes so much like certain views in England that the Normans who cast anchor in either of these countries could fancy, by the scenery of the land they had just conquered, that they had not left their birthplace. This resemblance had probably but very little influence on the fierce imagination of our ancestors, the sea-kings, for whom the ocean itself, with its sublime outlook, was but a highway, to be audaciously followed towards unknown quarry and pillage, scented from afar by these sea-lions, with their piratical instinct. But for us, their descendants, seated for centuries on the shores they have kept, and whose modern im-

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agination loves leisurely to contemplate the countries that they only dreamt of with designs of conquest, the resemblance between English and Norman landscapes is striking in many ways. Even the sky, the sky of our western regions, so often grey and cloudy, which so deeply penetrates our heart with its melancholy light, and when we are far away places home-sickness therein, adds again in Normandy to this illusion of England, and sometimes seems to push the sameness so far that they become identical.

And this applied, above all, to the manor that was called the Château of the Willows. Among all the mansions that stood on the coast of the Cotentin peninsula, there was certainly none that gave a better impression of one of those country houses of which so many are to be seen in England, suddenly emerging from a lake that encircles them, bathing their feet of stone in the vacant stillness of its waters. Situated on the Channel, not far from Sainte Mère-Eglise, this village, which had only preserved its Catholic name and its secular fairs from the Middle Ages, between La Fière and Picauville, recalled vanished feudal days in no other way. If one could have judged by what remained of this Château, now unfortu-

nately in ruins, it must have been built at the beginning of the seventeenth century, on the banks of the Douve, which runs by through open marshes, and it might have been named the Château of Open-Marsh just as well as the house that faced it, and which was so baptised. Open-Marsh and the Willows, separated by the vast fens through which passed the Douve, meandering like a long blue eel, languidly losing itself under the bridges of Saint-Lô, in the department of La Vire, and so far distant on the river that passed between them that they could not see each other in the remote background of their frequently foggy horizons, even on the days when the weather was clearest.

Isolated in these vast latitudes were the two aristocratic and solitary dwellings, needing formerly a certain amount of courage to live in them. The atmosphere of the surrounding marshes had been for some time as murderous as that of the Maremma before the epoch of the domestic drama of which the Château of the Willows was the obscure theatre. Not many years had passed since drainage, intelligently carried out, had purified the locality of the influence, nearly always mortal, under which generations of dwellers on the river

banks and inhabitants of these swamps, a wan and sickly population, had lived miserably, "trembling the fevers," as they would say, year in and year out. But towards the year 1845, these people had lost the look of languor and illness which had so long saddened the eye of the traveller passing through these typhus bogs, and health had returned there to mankind as well as to the land. Rendered healthy by culture that had transformed them into meadows, the marshes then offered, as far as the eye could reach, the rich view of a stretch of turf, with thick, close grass, almost bushy, where the grazing oxen were buried up to their breasts in the plentiful abundance of their pasture, on the brilliant green of which they stood out in their different postures, either in slow wanderings as they cropped their nourishment, with low-bent necks, or prone upon the flank, in the somnolence of their ruminating repose. This wet herbage, cut, here and there, by narrow ditches of alluvion, of opal transparency in their emerald depths, had also—stagnant hither and thither—round ponds of pure water, originating from the frequent rains of this damp climate of the west, and the primitively spongy soil in the neighbourhood of the Douve. In some parts, they were large

enough to form real lakes, furrowed and clouded in a thousand folds and ripples, of hues that shimmered and changed, according to the sky or the wind. Certainly one of the most striking beauties of this marshy landscape was these numerous kinds of lakes, which in autumn and winter assumed proportions of grandeur, but in summer, although diminished, never disappeared entirely, and became, beneath the sunlight, garden-plots of sparkling metallic plates, and islands of light. The Château of the Willows, which took its name from a copse of those trees surrounding it, rejoiced in a large garden, closed on the side of the marsh, which it overhung a few feet, by a long terrace, with a balustrade of stone, ornamented at intervals by those beautiful granite vases of Italian design which the seventeenth century has scattered everywhere. The entrance of the Château, together with the gate, was on the other side, on the land; but seen from the fens, it appeared inaccessible in its vast blue lake, from the bottom of which rose what seemed a white water-fairy—and that was the poetry of the house. Those who dwelt therein in the midst of this desert of earth and water could fancy themselves at the world's end. Even the railway, from Carentan to Isigny,

and which cut in two the swamps that had become pasture-lands, is too far away for its insolent whistle to be heard in this fenny corner, or to force one to see a fragment of its proud plume of smoke trailing across the horizon. Naught, then, except at rare intervals, but the strident cry of some wild duck or snipe troubled the thick silence of this Château, made, as it seemed, for the reveries of profound souls or for the mystery of passionate hearts who would have wished to hide there.

That evening—for it was in the evening, a summer evening, warmer in this open space by the same reason that makes it colder when the weather is chilly—the Château of the Willows gave out from its open windows, so long closed, but which at this moment were once more ajar, the noise of music and voices that said how life—worldly life—had at last returned to this Château so long uninhabited. An August sun now only touched with an oblique ray the tepid waters of the numerous lakes which all day had been its ardent mirrors. At this hour of tranquil vespers, the dragon-flies, which were called *demoiselles* in that part of the country, these turning azure marsh-haunters, tired of their immaterial skating on the crystal surface of the torpid waters, danced their last waltzes to

the dying breezes of the twilight before retiring to their bulrushes, when a young man, bare-headed, came down the steps of the Château of the Willows, and went and sat at the bottom of the garden on a bench placed at the edge of the sleeping water, which, on this side, encircled it in its folds. This youth was of almost divine beauty. He was of that age between adolescence and youth which partakes of each, and which might be called a third sex during the short time it lasts—for its beauty lasts still less than the swiftly evaporated charm of womankind. Once virility has dawned, this delicious and perishable comeliness disappears, and no trace of it is to be recognised, even in the handsomest man. That evening the young fellow seemed to be the pensive genius of solitude incarnated. But if that is what he sought for there, his hopes are soon destroyed. A voice, lighter and purer than the air that wafted it to him, twice pronounced the name, foreign to France, of *Allan*. If the dew could make a noise when falling into the chalice of a flower, it might have such celestial softness.

Such a voice could only belong to a being still more immaterial than a woman, to a child destined to be a woman one day, to the white dawn

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not yet daybreak. It was the voice of a little girl. At the slightest touch of the awkward hand of man on the strings of the marvellous instrument, it would have no longer such sounds.

The child to whom that voice belonged ran to him whom she had called *Allan,* and putting her hand on his shoulder, leaning on it with a bird's weight:

"See!" said she, breathlessly. "Oh, I had to run to get it, but at last I captured the *demoiselle.* See, Allan! Is she not of a most beautiful blue?"

She opened the fingers of her other hand a little to show Allan all the treasures of her conquest; but the young dreamer, with the dull inattention of some one waking up, had lifted his forehead from the hollow of his hands, and seemed to understand nothing of these childish joys he had forgotten, although he was still but a boy.

The child, seeing the morose indifference of Allan for the triumph which made her so joyful, stopped in her brilliant enumeration of the qualities of her captive with the slender bodice; poor, charming, tortured thing struggling in the depths of its furnace in the scarlet cup of a full-blown nasturtium.

"Begone, then, my poor little dear, since he does

not find you pretty," said the lassie, with sadness and vexation, letting go the insect and the flower.

There are cruel deceptions even at the age of fourteen. The disdainful glance of Allan covered the happy brow of the little girl with shame, as the reproach of a mother would have done. He could well see that he had hurt her, and it was not only her hand too roughly pressed as he had pushed it away, but the heart, more delicate still. The susceptible child said never a word, and was about to go, but Allan, reproaching himself for his violence, held her back gently, his hand in hers, and looked at that hand he had reddened, and which he kissed.

"Did I hurt you?" he asked uneasily.

"No," said she, proudly lying.

But her face, so open but a moment before, was now closed, and her charming brows were knitted.

"Pardon me that unwitting movement," continued Allan pressingly, "pardon me if I have been cruel. For the last few days, the state of my soul has been so miserable that I am truly unworthy to play with you. Leave me, I pray you, my dear Camilla. Go indoors. The evening chill will soon be falling. I want to be alone a little more. Go, I will soon join you."

She listened, and departed slowly, but rigid,

cold, and dumb. It could be seen that she had accepted none of Allan's words of reparation. But the thoughts that went with her she kept to herself. She moved away, the left forefinger between her lips, which had grown serious, and her look was oblique and dark. At the side of the fresh and lively joys of childhood, there was something deep that caused surprise in that little girl of fourteen. Camilla was of the age when young girls possess the least charm, and when they traitorously hide, beneath the signs of uncertain puberty and thinness of outline, that scourge of beauty which later strikes all hearts. Might it not be said that this ungraceful age is the first involuntary trick of these beings, who a few years afterwards are so slily and voluntarily artificial? Soon the terrible beauty blossoms forth; and it could be foreseen in Camilla by the oval shape of her face and her large black eyes, as beautiful and brilliant as the morning of a stormy day. They were close to a nose which would have been of Grecian purity without the palpitating nostrils, a striking, restless feature of what would have been an ideal face without it. Camilla's hair was of that red adored nowadays, but which at that time caused the despair of parents. To darken it, her mother used a leaden

comb and made her wear it cut very short, and without curls, like a boy, as she seemed when seen at the side of Allan, who looked like a young girl in youth's clothes, by virtue of his beauty. When no longer animated by play, and accidentally seated quietly in the drawing-room at her mother's side, the unruly hoyden of the garden could not be recognised in that other silent child, who languidly held her hands, full of grace, the madcap auburn head suddenly pensive.

She had gone back to the house. Allan had not always driven her away when she came to him, inviting him to her innocent games, as on that evening. Brought up side by side and under the same roof, separated only by the three years that made Allan that much older than herself, they had already, since they were in this neighbourhood, passed many hours together in these solitary marshes open to their lazy rambles, seeking rare flowers on the borders of the pools, stars of water which riddled the swamps and formed constellations like vast mosaic work of crystal with luminous incrustations. Often, profiting by the liberty granted them, or which they were allowed to take, they went as far as the Douve, which is a little distance from the Château of the Willows, and tore

from its creeks the water-lilies, flower of sleeping rivers, and brought garlands of them back to the Château. Of these long walks of the first days of life, the remembrance remains long in the heart; but their sweetness can only be tasted in the past, when it has all been poisoned! These strolls and *tête-à-tête* of children, who to-morrow will be men and women, possess secret intoxication, even for innocence. Did they feel that delirium? When they rambled thus the livelong day in the country where they met no one, did they only think of living? Did they live simply and unconsciously like the flower that opens and blooms beneath the vivifying ray; like the thousand created objects surrounding them, and which palpitated unknowingly? When they spoke together in hushed tones, did their voices kiss the air which passed between their young heads with lips as fresh as the breeze, that cruel coquette to whom the flowers cannot return the enticing caress she bestows upon them? And when Allan passed his arm around Camilla's serpentine, undulating waist, was it like the ivy round the tree, that it entwines without warmth?

Of the imprudent mothers of these children, the mother of Allan, had she lived, would have been the more guilty. Her son had the troubles, the

blushings, the bent head of an age which may be looked upon as a second birth in life. With imagination of such plenitude that it desired no aliments and fed on its own substance, Allan, whose studies were hardly concluded, repudiated every kind of book. The poets, those divine fairies of the tales they concoct for us, had but few wonders for him, who, as he read them, extracted all the gold from their most shining pages. The panther, sleeping in the lair of the man's heart, began to wake in his, and marked his brow with her claw. He suffered from the malady of being seventeen.

His eyes no longer possessed, if they had ever had it, the morning light of Camilla's glance. His veiled pupils rolled beneath half-closed lids, like those of an insolent sultana as she leaves her bath. Between long eyebrows imperceptibly knitted by continual reverie, a fold was marked, expiring furrow of mysterious, hidden thought, and his forehead was like unto a voluptuous cup by the shape and grace of its adorable outline. Allan's mother, an Englishwoman, it was rumoured, had passed her entire pregnancy in looking, with superstitious obstinacy, at the portrait of Lord Byron, whom she doted on, and this brow, charming and sublime, of a genius—where the pudicity of England sees the

mark of madness, boldly prolonged under the mass of curly hair that surrounds it—she had given to her son. This struck all who saw Allan for the first time, and it was only afterwards that one could perceive the original beauty of a face that only resembled itself. Habitually, Allan's eyes were sad, as are nearly always the eyes of those who look more in their heart than on life; but at the least emotion or at the least caprice of the young man, whose soul was more passionate than strong, but which would perhaps become robust before having a character of its own, there sparkled from his large, dull eyeballs a spear of light, like the golden trace of a shooting star in a black sky, through the still blacker branches of a forest. Allan's neck was bare like Camilla's, and he wore his hair cut short as she did. Only Camilla had the straight and bushy hair of a boy, while Allan's locks curled naturally and thickly round his dark face, as if they were the tresses of a young girl, and, by this singular contrast, these two children again gave the illusion which was unceasingly presented when they were seen, of their two sexes being transposed.

For some months past Allan had shown sadness, or, to speak more correctly, an inequality of hu-

mour which went so far as to attain Camilla. The cause of this change was unknown to the inhabitants of the Château of the Willows. Among all the women who had come there to pass the summer, among all those who looked at the handsome dreamer, whose beauty perhaps aroused a reverie also in their souls, there must have been at least one who had penetrated Allan's secret; for in studying this frail and almost transparent young man, in whom the emotions, mounting from the depths to the surface, made it easy to see that there was something more than mysteries of organization. Besides, is it at the beginning of life and at Allan's age that one can veil anything from her who causes you to feel everything? Later, even, is he sure that he can trust to his mask? It may be of bronze, or of marble, but these glances of women, seemingly so soft, and which are so penetrating, will easily pierce metal and stone, and see beneath the sentiment they have inspired, and that one most desires to hide from them.

Allan remained so long on the bench where he was reclining that he did not notice how the light was failing, until the last fold of the purple robe of twilight floated no longer on the horizon, where often it is to be seen still trailing across the sky

when the sun has disappeared. Darkness, swallowing up everything, suited his thoughts so well that he would have remained still longer at the same spot if he had not heard steps near him. He thought it was Camilla returning.

"Is it you, Camilla?" he asked.

But a voice no longer the musical tones of the child—a voice that the experience of life had broken (at least, one would have thought so, in listening to its profound intonations, which were a little hollow), replied:

"No! it is not Camilla."

And this voice, with its altered ring, like the irresistible appeal of a syren's chant, made Allan jump up at once.

A tall lady advanced.

"What are you doing there, Allan, all alone, at this time of day?" said she. "The night, which is icy and cold, should have driven you within. Camilla, whom I have just seen, is sulking in a corner of the drawing-room. Have you had any quarrel with my daughter?"

"No, madame," he answered, like a guilty schoolboy, and his voice had such trembling accents that one could have sworn he was lying.

"Then why not come back? Why did you fly

from the room just now? Why do you get so unsociable? Everybody is complaining of you at the Château."

"That is because everybody bores me!" he answered with lassitude.

"Oh! you are too great a poet for us, Allan!" she exclaimed, and her voice was full of slight irony. But the sarcasm fell flat, and all was silent again, until she added, in a more genuine tone:

"Do you know that I am uneasy, Allan? I ignore what is passing in your mind, but you seem to be suffering greatly. Are you ill, my friend? Or if you are not, why this inexplicable moroseness? What is the matter with you? Confide in me."

And the implacable woman took the burning palm of the young man in her hand of ice.

"No! never!" he retorted, imperiously drawing away his fingers, and he escaped to the willow copse behind him; but his sobs could be heard.

"Poor child!" she murmured.

Her face could not be seen, and with slow steps she took the path conducting to the Château.

II.

The Château of the Willows in olden times, like most of the mediæval castles, had probably been some formidable war-nest, hidden like an ambush in these Cotentin marshes, then inexpugnable quagmires; but the feudal fortress, destroyed after the religious wars of the sixteenth century, had been rebuilt at the commencement of the seventeenth, and transformed into spacious and peaceful dwellings. In 1845, it belonged to the Countess Yseult de Scudemor, widow of the last descendant of the old Norman family of that name, and whose very short life had been spent away from France, in the highest diplomatic employment at foreign courts.

This Countess de Scudemor, espoused far away, and who did not belong to the neighbourhood, but who had sojourned there with her husband some little time after her marriage, had recently returned thither with her daughter. By what had she been drawn there? The visit she had paid with her husband had been too short for it to

have remained in her memory. When she reappeared at the Willows, the world of the neighbouring châteaux had almost forgotten her. Moreover, she was so changed that those who had caught a glimpse of her formerly would probably not have recognised her if they had not known in advance that it was she. Her absence, her travels, the dispersal in distant climes of all the gifts of beauty, of all the brilliancy of youth which she was known to possess, and which she seemed to have left behind her; the child she called her daughter, and whose birth had not been known in these parts; the youth who accompanied her, and to whom she only gave the Scotch name of Allan, all this surrounded her with unknown mystery which was difficult to penetrate; for her reserved manner, full of nobility, but icy cold, never allowed the most attentive observation to bore into her thoughts and surprise her secrets.

She was a woman of strange and silent charm. Society, which she overawed—even unwittingly—called her distinguished, and generously understood by that word, nowadays so common, the respect of intellect that she did not show. Her mind might have been cultivated, she was perhaps witty, but she made no sign. She was quite as indifferent to

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this wit attributed to her as she was to life, which had perhaps been cruel. Although she had still enough of the beauty which suffices to make women prize existence, she enjoyed the careless calm of a being who wishes for nothing, and neither boasts nor complains. She was therefore natural and simple. Doubtless on account of her extreme coldness, women loved her not, although she had no jealousy, as she had no longer any pretensions to the successes of vanity. She was supposed to profess very audacious opinions. Have you noticed that society always attributes bold ways of thinking to those who do not appear to have much respect for the dogmas of the world? So much daring is required for this. But, once this assertion made, it would not have been possible to justify it by facts. In society, the Countess Yseult de Scudemor was in the habit of only joining in conversation when it turned upon vague and general subjects. Did she act thus out of disdain or indolence? Did she fear to betray, in the heat of small talk, some thought or sentiment, and thus give a glimpse of the perspective of her past life? No one knew, and the manner in which her whole bearing imposed respect was such that she would have bewildered the most insolent observer.

But the Countess de Scudemor made no effort to realise this effect. Her whole person breathed that patrician expression, and it was portrayed in her tranquil lineaments; never was the least contraction ever seen. She showed neither scorn nor languor. Her manner—that attitude of the mind, as attitude is the manner of the body—was slow even unto *nonchalance,* but mindless. Her sober way of speaking, and her observations, well-nigh colourless, suited her voice, three-quarters inaudible. Doubtless imaginative, as are all women, but her ideality had gone to sleep, its head beneath its wing, through the fault of these fatiguing "five o'clocks" of life, and society could not rouse it from its slumber. She was always natural and truthful in insignificant things; for we need the interest of some sentiment to become false. What struck one most in Madame de Scudemor was her immense calmness. When her usual serious demeanour thawed at some witty word, at the touch of some amiable, light approbation, in a smile which was rare, and checked at the corners of the offended mouth by an already perceptible wrinkle, her slight laugh did not seem to disturb the calm over which it rapidly passed. On the smoothest lakes, water sometimes ripples beneath the flight

of a bird along its flat surface, but on that mirror, rather than lake; on that immovable glass, there passed no skimming claw, and the solid crystal was not scratched. There was ineffable kindness in the way Madame de Scudemor spoke, much more than in what she said; and this is the exact way of describing her unspoken affability. Nevertheless, there were imperceptible touches which ought not to have revealed themselves; for her features, so well suited to portray energy, and the restful strength that enveloped her from her beautiful forehead to her nervous feet, worthy to stand upon a pedestal, kept away from her all idea of vague reverie, banishing all the angelic spiritualities of poetry, harp-like melody, that an unknown power sometimes extracts from a brass instrument; melancholy mists of twilight, through which a dome of bronze may ofttimes lose somewhat of the rigid austerity of its architecture.

But society folk did not understand these shades of contrast that expert practised observers could alone have caught sight of in Madame de Scudemor. Men pass near a woman of the age of the Countess, among all those met with in society, as if near a plant like unto a hundred others. The blossom only marks the difference in the eyes of these

rough botanists. Once the flower withered, only green leaves are left, hardly worthy of a glance, and lost among many others. In the eyes of the world, Countess Scudemor was only a woman over forty, and who would listen to you for hours much rather than speak to you, as she smoothed with the ends of her fingers her *bandeaux* along her temples and cheeks, where the pale freshness of youth was replaced by an orange-like hue, yet soft and tender. To see her head, not uplifted by inward pride, and which a sad thought never bowed, made one think of a majestic caryatid freed from its entablature. "The statue is still there, but the woman has gone," the men said to console themselves when she made despair take the place of their gallantry, and when her noble, chilly air drove them from her side, and prevented them making love to her. They proclaimed that she was "done with" as a woman; and indeed she had the beauty of a beautiful corpse, but which had not yet fallen prone, like those Russian grenadiers of the battle of Eylau, who, remaining standing in the ranks, seemed still alive, and had to be pushed and thrown down to surely testify that they were dead.

Countess Yseult de Scudemor had been formerly friendly with the mother of Allan de Cyn-

thry, an orphan brought up under the care of a guardian. When she died, the Countess's friend had strongly recommended her son to her, and Madame de Scudemor had drawn young De Cynthry to her side. Would she not have a kind of maternal pity for the child of a lost friend? Allan was for Madame de Scudemor something between a son and a nephew, and he was neither one nor the other. A mixed and dangerous position, like the feeling it called up, which no tie confirmed. Besides, with Allan and even with Camilla, the Countess showed herself but little affectionate. She was only amiable. Her disposition seemed averse to any kind of exterior demonstration. Had it been otherwise, perchance her manner, which contrasted naturally in fascinating fashion with the vehement character of her physiognomy, would have lost somewhat of its charm. But also that was exactly why lively and enthusiastic people believed her to be egotistical. False judgment of shallow minds, jumping at conclusions; the common mistake of men whose hands itched impatiently to find an easy instrument to attune to their lusts.

To return to Allan: did Madame de Scudemor properly comprehend the sentiment of calm and tenderness she felt for him? A feeling of our

souls is often made up of so many things, of such imperceptible subtilties, that we should sometimes be astonished to see of what wisps of straw this marvellous web is composed. This mysterious tapestry is woven silently in our hearts, despite ourselves; but did Madame de Scudemor know with what cunning threads the work had been done in her inmost being? Doubtless, the fact of Allan's birth, and the death of his mother, had been the primary cause of the interest she took in young De Cynthry. Society is ofttimes stupid, and so are even those who, like society, are the least deceived by the reality of things and their lying appearances. Often children, who have been left without mother or father when young, are loved too fondly. They are thought worthy of pity because family troubles—which exist, even as the troubles of society—will not touch them some day, and resembling new autochthons by the death of those who gave them birth, have only grown up by virtue of the sole strength of self. Madame de Scudemor was not exempt from this vulgar interest, but was that the only interest which enveloped Allan in her eyes? That was not the only feeling. There was another, deeper and more tender, which had its source in the sentiment which she inspired;

for Allan, although brought up by her, had not found in this community of life, shared since childhood, the preservative habit that saves mothers and sisters from the incestuous love of hearts attaining puberty. The sentiment of Allan for Madame de Scudemor, this great lady so grave and so imperturbably maternal, had been imbibed and developed without distrust in the most filial and chaste familiarities. But if she had only possessed the piercing foresight and the acquired intelligence of sensuality, those twin sisters of our soul's sufferings, she must have guessed at the onset from the confused ardour and the ferments of all kinds that were laboriously working in Allan. There are sadly privileged beings who commence their martrydom of the male early; being the first chosen by the Master on the playground of their idle childhood, to be led to work in the vineyard of grief. They return at eventide all pale, with contorted lips and dull eye, and their parents think the boredom of school has thus changed them. Their idiotic tenderness knows not what is passing in these too precocious souls. Should their experience one day cause the idea to strike them, they drive it away because they were happy and tranquil at their sons' age.

From the age of twelve, sensuality had come and troubled him with its obscure, warm, and sweet dreams. Sketches rather than complete visions, the remembrance of which recalls nothing, but brings burning blushes; a vague, tormenting, and infinite passion, which as yet arises from no visible objects, and which enervates the faculties at the moment they are gushing forth with supple and vigorous jets. During after-years, Allan only betrayed the inward storm by a few flashes. There was in him, as his voice (the voice one has at that age), something of the man, that leaked ever so suddenly through the childish envelope. He would have been, as we all were, ill through the suffering inherent to that epoch (1845)—the terrible commonplace epidemic of that time of the literature of souls, and of which the René of Chateaubriand was the highest idealisation—if his singular position had not saved him from these aimless agitations, and given a more real, more human, and more unique physiognomy to his passions.

This Countess Yseult de Scudemor, at whose side he passed his life, soon captured all his thoughts. Although with him she showed the gravity of a mother, a mother would not have so well given rise to adoration and respect. Star of

the first love, beginning to shine in the night of our hearts, the brilliancy then shown would have escaped all eyes. So far, imagination alone had been compromised. He thought he was following a pure and timid gleam; a hidden planet which arose smiling on an inaccessible horizon; a mystical love worthy of the Muse. But the lurid ray only illuminated as yet the brow of his Galatea. It was only when from the animated forehead the gleam grew into a torrent of flame upon the marble of the bosom that she said, "'Tis I!"

The time soon arrived when the child's Galatea also spoke thus. The little peace he had at intervals was soon lost. He was no longer satisfied with the disinterested worship which had sufficed for him so long, with the dumb adoration which does not ask its expression hidden in the heart to be returned when it escapes by accident. The poet, as ever, drew back from the reality of passion. On the altar where he hung up his garlands, human nature prompted him with the desire of some less pure sacrifice. Then he began to be frightened at himself. He feared a feeling of which the exactions grew more imperious each day. Prematurely a man by his sensible faculties, he was a child by his will. He was paying the penalty of the silly

and dangerous education of a sceptical and pedantic period, which only busied itself with the development of the intellect. His manner changed entirely. Frightful sadness seized him, and went so far as to decompose his smile. He passed his days without books, in solitude and idleness, that were really alarming, and Madame de Scudemor was right when she told him, under the trees of the garden:

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III.

A few days after the scene in the garden that opened this story, the Countess de Scudemor was seated—and not half reclining, for nothing of her was languid—on a sofa, in an apartment which she occupied exclusively at the Willows. She was enveloped in a long, loose, white, wide dressing-gown—a careless robe that allowed a glimpse, through the mistiness of its folds, of the lines and contours of a figure that time had spared, as if to compensate for the vanished royalty of the old days. It was the hour when women prepare their toilette before dinner, and when the lady of the house is perfectly free in the country. The Countess de Scudemor seemed very agitated. Like sea-gulls, harbingers of the storm, unaccustomed to the cloudless sky of her brow, painful thoughts seemed to oppress her. It could be seen that some struggle was going on in her soul—something that would conclude with a resolution; but taking a resolution does not always ensure victory.

Allan entered, staggering, and as if crushed by the air and the odour of that room into which his foot penetrated for the first time. He leant against a piece of furniture.

"Do not remain standing," she said to him, and she pointed to a seat near the sofa where she sat so straight. The handsome head of Allan nearly touched the shoulder of Madame de Scudemor, but he could only see her profile.

"I sent for you, Allan," she said. "I wanted to see you alone, for I have to speak to you of grave and painful things."

This introduction was solemn. As she spoke, she twirled in her fingers a sprig of heliotrope, doubtless torn from those which blossomed in long white vases at her window; and the flower could not have told us the feeling that had detached it from its stem in the clutch of an inattentive hand. The voice, so deeply soothing, was more veiled in its accent than usual. It resounded deeply down in Allan's breast, like a stone thrown into a well.

"When you left me so abruptly the other day, refusing to answer me," she continued, after a pause, "did you think you had not told me everything? Do you believe that I required an answer to know all? You may deceive Camilla; but a

woman, and a woman of my age, do you think, Allan, that it could be possible?"

She stopped without turning her head, her eyelids closed, and with the imperishable nobility of her attitude which never betrayed her, ever twisting with her slender fingers the heliotrope flower which overwhelmed them with its perfume. Half joyous to find she had read him, half startled with what might follow, Allan blushed up to his eyes. Mysterious carmine of the feelings, mixed on some unknown divine palette, who could enumerate the hundred different confusing ideas revealed by its uniform tint?

"But I have acted lightly," she went on. "I ought not to have asked you for an avowal. Between us, all confidence is impossible, and I have resolved to spare you from it."

She was silent a second, as if collecting herself.

"Allan," she said, "what has led you astray so far is your age and your imagination. They must be blamed, as they spoil your life so early, and not me, who might be your mother. Therefore, I am in hopes that this folly will soon cease. Besides, I shall soon be quite old. Then you will be able to make comparisons which will lower me as much as they have just now exalted me in your mind.

The love of a youth for a woman who has lived nearly half a century ought to be the least lengthy of all his passing amours."

She made another pause, scanning her words as she scanned his heart.

"But, however that may be, my child, we must leave one another. You will return to your university in England. I will not see you again until cured of this incredible caprice, which may, perhaps, finish by making you unhappy. When you are more calm, when you manage to see that your desire of affection can be assuaged by women as rich in the youth of the heart as in that of bodily beauty, you will seek me out again, always your friend, and time will have taken care at my expense to make all mistake impossible."

And she ceased as naturally as she had spoken. Had she not been reasonable and natural? The poor heliotrope blossom was withered, and she threw it away. She had taken the same time to wound a living creature, with her tone full of solicitude, as she had to destroy a creation of nature in the soft pressure of her fingers. Power of the soul, unknown power! In matters of sentiment there are curves that escape all calculations.

Frankly, might she not have been accused of

hypocrisy, this woman who knew she was loved, and who put on such airs of maternity with the unhappy wretch who adored her? Could there not be seen an atrocious, tartuffish pride in this pretension of old age, of which she saw the perspective with so much frequency, when everything about her urged her to forget it? Strange actress —or if she was not, this was Diogenes-like vanity which passed through the rents in the mantle. A strong lover would have broken her mask on her face, and stripped her soul stark naked before him. But Allan was not a clever man. He had none of those resentful feelings that wounded passion whispers to the heart with the breath of a hurricane. Poor cur! he crouched under her blows. When she had said "We must part," his timid and unsophisticated soul found naught but tears.

But who can understand the magic of tears for a woman? Let them flow, white, fresh and warm, what matters it? They always form a river that carries the dykes of the heart far away. For these beings of divine pity, there is always the heart's blood in the least tear that is shed at their feet. Great seducers know this well! Their power is in knowing how to weep. Don Juan and Love-

lace shed tears; infamous power of these terrible tricksters! Allan was neither Don Juan nor Lovelace. He was not then, and never became later, one of those crocodiles of seduction whose tears enticed, only to devour. He was at the time of life when one is still true, and his tears were the involuntary sobs of a child. With his girlish frame, he might have been taken for Camilla's sister, punished by his mother for having dressed up as a boy.

For her part, the Countess de Scudemor was no longer at the epoch of her existence when the simple sight of emotion could move her. Nevertheless, this frigid person could not resist the eloquence of these dumb tears and such resigned despair. She drew poor Allan towards her, on his knees on the carpet, and lengthily wiped his eyes with her perfumed handkerchief. She no longer had the courage to repeat to him "that he must go."

"Ah! this is what I foresaw," she said. And after having sought in her thoughts some time, she added: "Annoying boy, you shall remain near me."

At these words, he clasped her knees against his tearful face. He inhaled her, hidden thus in the

folds of her dressing-gown, where his last tears had fallen, and he drank them as if they were nectar, because they were warmed up on the fabric from the contact of the body it veiled.

Thus already the expiation of the words she had at first uttered was consummated. This woman of haughty wisdom, of previsions of dry reality, had not been able to resist the tears of a child. Also, must the avowal be made? For a woman there must be something very touching in this love silent through respect, but so expressive, which she has aroused without thinking in a virgin soil, at the very moment when all affection was departing, never to return; and truly it was permissible for her to confuse what she felt with love, and, without a doubt, many women have so confused it. Eternally tender, they have been easily mistaken in the ardent gratitude which revives sentiment in their old, widowed, and afflicted hearts. Travelled women burnt by many suns, tired by all the storms in this desert they have just crossed alone, and without complaining of the thirst that henceforward remains unappeased; an affection—no matter of what kind!—is it not for them like a cup of the dew of heaven, bestowed in the name of a merciful God? But when this affection is love

like that of the youth that is past, is there not more sweet tenderness than in the amours of early years, in this adoration which was no longer to be expected? The woman thinks life is finished and buried in her heart. She thinks that tufts of grass are springing up green in the cemetery of her breast, and behold! she finds a living affection in herself, a last bunch of flowers to be gathered, and not a grave to be dug; such an affection as she would wish for her daughter as a dowry! Human maternity may be as sublime as it will, it cannot withstand such an ordeal—and although lacking love to give in return for the love she inspires, it is nevertheless not the fair head of a son that appears the most often in the clouds of daydreams like a beloved star, albeit the face is that of a youth of equally tender age, so true is it that for women the fruit of their entrails can be less sacred than the creations of their glances!

Nevertheless, Madame de Scudemor had resumed her maternal bearing, and having made Allan sit by her side on the sofa:

"But if you remain here," she said, "I desire, Allan, that you promise to obey me. Will you promise me that?"

The man, on whose lips was less down than on

of the woman one loves can melt away the love we feel for her, and he, resisting not, said ever "Yes," although he knew well in his heart that there were a thousand impossibilities for obedience. A charming conversation, cut by pauses and carried on in half-tones, because the nakedness of the affairs of the soul, that interior Eve, has such uneasy pudicity that she gathers to add to her girdle thousands of leaves that are useless to her secret.

"'Tis well," said she, with the smile of the sculptor whose first chip of the chisel has been lucky. "'Tis well, my child. I prophesy that you will soon be calm."

And as she might have done to Camilla, as it seemed—for who can say if the darkness that reigns in a woman's heart is not made up of contradictions?—she placed upon Allan's brow a long kiss of seeming love. From that pale and icy lip sprung a scarlet sea upon the dilated temples of the young man. We must have felt it ourselves to know what superhuman and mad movements arise in our being when we desire—useless effort—to take back with our lips the kiss exiled on the forehead.

"You do wrong to kiss him, mamma," said Camilla, who entered with bunches of pansies in her

hands. "If you love him, you will then no longer love your poor Camilla. You don't know how he neglects me now. Formerly he would never have let me gather such a big bouquet as this all alone."

She threw herself on the sofa, between Allan and her mother, sulkily turning her round and graceful shoulder to Allan. Thus placed, her face moist with the afternoon heat, which had already lost the noonday sting; with ungloved hands, mouth half-opened, but without a smile, her white dress so short that her light-laced boots on tiny feet, that she capriciously moved hither and thither, could be entirely seen; as serious as the flowers she held, she resembled both a hope and a presentiment—a junction between the budding of youth and the first faded illusion, when the declivity of the hill is caught sight of, an age at which we ought to remain. She had placed behind her ear, in her hair of an auburn hue that the sun had already darkened, a red rose, in the corolla of which a tired yellow bee had fallen to sleep, its rage now blunted.

"You must make peace with Allan, my dear," said Madame de Scudemor, as with the handkerchief that Allan had wetted with his tears she drove away the bee, detached from the rose where it rested in its purple cradle. "You must not re-

main angry with him. He has always been so amiable with you. He neglects you, say you? But if he has been ill for some little time past, or too busy to mix himself up with your games, would it be sensible of you to bear malice? Besides, I know you tease. If Allan has neglected you, you have probably been saucy or sulky with him. Far from bringing him back, you made him more distant, and thus it is that, as it often happens, you are both in the wrong."

"Oh, you have put on your severe air already, mamma," she replied. "I assure you it is he who is entirely in the wrong."

And her voice trembled as when the heart is full.

"I am not scolding you, my child," retorted Madame de Scudemor, joining an affectionate gesture to her words. "Only, I do not want you to be unjust, and, above all, vindictive. I order you to kiss your friend, and that all be made up between you, children that you both are."

And Camilla, happy to obey, turned round furiously, as was her way in all things, the way of this lassie whose sensations were so keen, and with passionate innocence she threw her arms round Allan's neck, and he, dumb and dull again, had

bitten his lip till the blood came as he heard the words:

"Children that you both are!"

He kissed her, but with ungracious reluctance.

"Have you become capricious, too, in your turn, Allan?" said Madame de Scudemor significantly, turning upon him the mobile orbs of her large eyes.

Had she suddenly seen, with the eagle-like perspicacity of a loved woman, the depth of the sentiment she inspired?

IV.

The days passed, but no longer for Allan in the furtive shade of the garden, at the foot of the willow trees; or on the distant river-banks, the chosen spots for his walks, when the Countess of Scudemor's drawing-room echoed with the joy, laughter, and chatter of the assembled ladies. He was certain of being seen by *her* now! She would divine his thoughts every moment. Irritation against the loved woman, that injustice inherent to the very roots of our sentiment, because that feeling is unsuspected; this perpetual lie given by her who inflames it to the idealising desire of her image, drove him no more from the house with his old concentrated pique—the bitterness of hidden passion. Whether blessed with the soul of a Timon or a La Vallière, a human being only has recourse to solitude when all men turn aside. Wounded passion always drives us into solitude. Without the egotism of some passion, none of us would yield up our lives to this mistress of Raphael who kills, but not like a living woman, for this one

has not even an appearance of love to give us; none would rest his lassitude on the perfidious bosom of this friend, a subtle Iago always lurking in the least noble parts of our mind, when none but ourselves are with us. Solitude is a divine thing, inapplicable to men. They cannot resist it, when they dare appropriate it.

Allan hardly ever left Madame de Scudemor now. Could she complain of his assiduity? Had she not told him, insisted, commanded it? Although she had spoken to him with the tone of experience, Allan did not yet know her enough to prevent vague hopes from permeating all his thoughts. Besides, passion has sometimes tricks of modesty in its desires, which ought to make us tremble for the results of the hypocrisy or the incoherence of our feelings. At first, very little suffices for the voracious ogre—passion, who later craves for all. Allan was happy in the mystery there was between him and Madame de Scudemor. Since the day of their *tête-à-tête,* and in spite of his distrustful disposition—all great imaginations are distrustful—he carried the burden of his existence more lightly, returning for a short time to the admirable fatuity of youth, when confidence extends to all things, mouth and nostrils open to

every breeze of the future. He answered with the celestial awkwardness of a true sentiment to the softly mocking jokes of the ladies who had come from Paris to pass the summer at the Willows, and who had not seen without remarking it the change in the disposition of this handsome young man, whom they would have liked to have paid a little more attention to them. But in the eyes of Allan none was comparable with Yseult de Scudemor, whom, doubtless, they called *passée,* in their pride of freshness and beauty, and at whose feet he sacrificed all their humiliated years of youth and springtime.

It has been seen that what characterised the love of Allan for Madame de Scudemor was excessive timidity. The more it grew, the less could Allan be familiar with the woman at whose side his youth had been passed. A truly adolescent love is that which manifests itself by the tremor of respect. Young in the soul, for passion fatally becomes insolent; young in life, for, after the first, do we ever find a second beneath the draperies of vanity? This timidity, which is nothing more than perpetual emotion aroused in us by the intuition of the beauty that takes us prisoner, was still further increased by several accessory circumstances which

modified in a new and powerful fashion the position of Allan de Cynthry in the eyes of Madame de Scudemor. Nearly always, we only love what is nearest to us in life. It is so rare not to fall in love with one of these flowers of existence which has blossomed on the same branch as ourselves! The infinity of virgin thoughts softly tinted by the first dawning rays of love caused two hearts to beat quicker, two hearts that began very nearly to beat as one. And because their two hands have touched nothing yet, they seek each other; and because this pair of hearts has not yet been joined, they spring towards each other, with the marvellous instinct of their sighs. The infinity of the other mysteries of life: God, intelligence, the trial of the heart, reveal themselves in us less intimately. Atoms by our thoughts, as in the universe, we have enough with one abyss, and tremblingly plunge into that where roses, as in certain extinct volcanoes, form carpets for our sybaritic indulgences. Of a truth, women, who only live by love, are right to be proud when they are beautiful; for the shame of the spiritual nature of man is written in these burning and delicious impressions which disorganise us, and which are caused by their adorable beauty.

But if this beauty is already dead, or about to die, attacked at the most pure part of its source; if—strange hazard!—we search far away for a soul to love with all the aspirations of our soul; when we smile with the first smile of half-opened corollas at a withered flower soiled by the foot of a passing man, buried in the dust of eventide, a crowd of unaccustomed facts comes crowding up around us to make this bizarre love a hundred times more unstable still. Young, we so much resemble all that is young! Youth is so large that it takes up all the room in life. Is it not the future that we carry with us, like young girls? Is it not the same ignorance? Is it not by approaching a soul that has been too early illuminated we can read—all in gold and light—the writing of the first desires, as when lighting up a transparency we cause fiery symbols to appear on the dark ground where they are indistinctly printed? When all our life is the unknown future, the past is above all the unknown. A soul that has lived its life is a much more formidable mystery than that which begins its existence, and also for whoever, in the youthful waters of the bay, unfurls the white sail to the growing breeze. Ah! what ardent and dreamy curiosity do we not feel for the ship returned from the most

distant shores, and which has ploughed the many bitter waves. Oh! how that woman, because she differs from us by reason of all her impenetrable past, appears divine to us through her mortal pallor! Like the young girl, our legitimate spouse, she has not been created from our ribs. We adore a hidden God, and never do we tremble in the presence of the most charming virgins as we feel ourselves quaking before her, or at her approach.

And imagination—that gnarled root of the passions—finds satisfaction in these human incomprehensibilities. Do not believe that in the love of Allan for Madame de Scudemor, the love of the youth for the aged woman, there was anything more gloriously immaterial than there was in all that bears the name of love. In changing its object, passion does not change its nature. It has always its causality and its goal in the muddy depths of our fleshly being, a circle whose two ends join and mingle, no one knows where.

Besides, the beauty we love and prefer is a secret that Imagination keeps for ever. Hair powdered by passing years, on a neck that has lost the softness of the pale blue of its beautiful veins; eyes, of which the flame in the slightly dulled pupils is concentrated, instead of throwing out rays, as if

the heart had absorbed in its arid sands the radiant light and the tears that used to play therein; a mouth where the breath, though ardent, is no longer fresh; the temples, more expressive and more wide beneath the daily darker tint of dull bistre, is there not in you as much voluptuousness as in the efflorescence of youth? Might we not say that the soul, even like nature, lets the most beautiful plants blossom among ruins? And when the imagination is developed, does it not attain in everything to what less richer imaginations which have remained outside these developments, dare to call depravation?

Thus the age of Madame de Scudemor, which placed a whole existence between her and Allan, might have been one of the causes of this timidity, but, of a surety, it was not the only one. Another existed, still more intimate. Most strong passions borrow their force from the most abrupt contrasts. They give the lie in startling fashion to our most inveterate habits, to the most original of our tendencies. They violently break human unity. Despotic natures, for instance, are the most lamb-like in love. You can lead them where you like. Others only sacrifice their life; but they sacrifice their will—a most magnificent abnegation, if it is

one at all—if it was not the most intoxicating enjoyment that exists! Who has not understood that Catherine II wished to be beaten by her lover? Do not take this revolting demand for the fancy of a worn-out empress. You do not know how much supreme, unexpected, palpitating, celestial happiness—for this last adjective hides the unknown thus suddenly revealed—there is in this movement, contrary to the laws that govern proud hearts, that which makes the most haughty fall on their knees and lick the feet of a miserable creature!

This feeling was experienced by Allan. A spoilt child, tenacious, imperious, he found unaccustomed pleasure (and these pleasures are the most intense) in submitting, in humiliating himself, in crawling on his stomach, pressing his heart against the floor, under the shoes of Madame de Scudemor, and this joy of being dominated by her made the impressions communicated to his senses, and which inflamed them to the point of delirium, more disturbing still.

The life in the country together, soft, lazy, close to one another, this *far niente* of sofa and turf, of forgetful walks and talks, is the most dangerous existence. If young girls would confess to you, they would tell you that there, above all, they felt

the heart had absorbed in its arid sands the radiant light and the tears that used to play therein; a mouth where the breath, though ardent, is no longer fresh; the temples, more expressive and more wide beneath the daily darker tint of dull bistre, is there not in you as much voluptuousness as in the efflorescence of youth? Might we not say that the soul, even like nature, lets the most beautiful plants blossom among ruins? And when the imagination is developed, does it not attain in everything to what less richer imaginations which have remained outside these developments, dare to call depravation?

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themselves blushing without knowing why. It is probably the air scented with lilac or jessamine, with the noonday heat and the evening cool breezes they breathe there, that call up sudden blushing with the undulations of the river and the shuddering of the trees. When their heads are bent over their work, while long and curly hair throws a shadow over the hands that embroider, and hide the downcast face, you may see their breast swelling as they hear the birds singing. That is during the silent quiet at two o'clock in the afternoon, in the drawing-room, with the windows and shutters closed on the south side and opened towards the north. But in the evening, whether she remains at some casement looking towards the horizon, her head in her hand, or whether she goes rambling in some solitary alley, night happily comes on, and no one knows what becomes of her. In this liberty and neglect of all things, if there is a book forgotten on the corner of an armchair, it is some poet or other: Lamartine or Alfred de Musset, whose songs of a wounded bird were written on the leaves of the wild rose, with the richest, darkest blood of his heart; or 'tis a novel, more sad still; of the difference between the story of a life and an escaping sigh. And this stifling peru-

sal lasts eight long days, during which she bathes her poor inflamed eyes to refresh them in the moisture of her breath, which she lengthily deposits on her handkerchief that keeps the secret of her tears. Those are most innocent details; there is not one of those insignificant trifles but what does not hide an awful danger. Cannot the plague lie concealed in a wrinkle of the most soft cashmere shawl and reach the shoulders that it enfolds? Unutterably sweet are the days, on the borders of the lake where the swans glide languidly, in the shadow of the woods where it is so easy to lose one's self, obscure retreats where the footstep is no longer heard, by the waterfalls which stifle all sound by their fleeting noise; and on the return, there are the rooms where often the girl is left alone, and where she is always found again accompanied; then near the drawn curtain where a reverie falls upon the brow like an impalpable caress, in the heat that causes the indolent bearing and burns up the moisture of the lips; and the intoxicating familiarities, such as the pressure of an ungloved hand, in a security based upon I know not what insensate faith in the midst of abandonment, idleness, and delight that makes us understand the sleepy-eyed life and the intrepid effemin-

acy of that people who say *"Mia cara!"* to every woman, and dream of love at the foot of volcanoes.

But when a man is plunged, as Allan was, in this Capua of a beautiful summer in the country, while a deep love seized you for the first time, when she we idolise is there, enveloping in her charm every incident of this languid life, the happiness of it all is indescribable; but doubtless God has made it impossible to resist it! As with Allan, a man feels more than ever blossoming in his soul that large flower of love planted by the breath of a woman. He believes that this air in which he revels with a voluptuous thrill of his whole being will carry the pollen of the hidden blossom to her he adores in silence. Tender illusions, ravishing mysticism, superstitious confidence in nature, fecundation of the soul by the soul, fragile dreams of first love!—why is it that out of these divine elements is composed the unknown evil of life?

Alas! Allan had only imperfectly felt this delicious phase of love; but he had guessed it. The woman he adored did not ignore his passion for her. Had he not told her? She had divined it. Moreover, when she had spoken, she had not destroyed the restrained desires and the early doubts.

For some time past these doubts and these stifled longings did not exist in his soul that lived too fast. In the happiness of all the possessions that follow, nothing is worth the poetry of the heart on its awakening—this mysterious impression of the day that is about to follow the rosy shadow which is no longer darkness through the yet closed eyelids. The madman believes it not, but so it is! The happiness that is passed is the only moment we regret, and which remains sacred in the midst of the purest remembrances we have profaned. In lieu of that, Allan had not even had the delirious avowal which does not recompense, but sterile pity with scarcely an echo. Nevertheless, the mockery he feared had been spared him, and that sustained him. On the other hand, at Allan's age, when passion has still a future, desire is a pleasure rather than a torture, and the senses feed on contemplation as much as the heart.

The more the passions grow, the more they seek to reach reality, the more they become materialised. Platonism can never be aught but the commencement of love. Allan was no longer dreaming—he was in contemplation; but not to contemplate is to see with the eyes, and that is intoxication! Madame de Scudemor, in the insignificant

details of every-day life, seemed to him still more disturbing than in the poetical divinations of his thoughts. Her presence swept away dreams and recollections, and even Imagination was conquered.

As for her, she whispered to herself all that she had said aloud to Allan. Sometimes her reason timidly put forth a reproach; but she sought to attenuate it, saying to herself that all this was folly, certainly dangerous in a young girl of Allan's age, because the impressions of a woman are more profound than those of a man, but which would soon pass away without the employment of violent means.

Folly! the expression they all make use of, these incredulous females of forty—a word of pride, but of very vulgar wisdom!

Be that as it may, a terrible hypothesis kept her brain on the rack and appalled her conscience. If the love of Allan was not only what she thought? If it was not merely ephemeral enthusiasm, but one of those heartrending passions which would, later on, destroy the destiny of the young man, so handsome, intellectual, and generous? At any cost, she resolved to know all, despite Allan's timidity.

Since the day when she had accused him of be-

ing capricious, she had been more tender and caressing with Camilla, to whom she hardly ever gave a kiss on the forehead, or a kind glance. Did she want to prevent the little girl from noticing the coldness of her friend? If she had been a coquette, one of those hangmen's wives, full of vanity, who enjoy to feel under their pearly nails the palpitations of a bleeding heart which they intend to devour afterwards, we might have thought that she designed to study the effect of the unexpected tenderness she was showing her daughter on Allan. Certainly, she had a motive for behaving in such a novel way. But who, except herself, could give the reason of this calculation?

V.

ALLAN TO MADAME DE SCUDEMOR.

"You who read me once, cannot you guess a second time what is passing in my thoughts? Are you, then, not the superior being I imagine you to be? Do you not know what impels me to write to you? And if you do know, why act in this way, which is both incomprehensible and cruel? Listen.

"You have seen that I loved you. That was easy. The love I feel in my breast would dazzle the eyes of the blind, and you are a woman, and have passed the youthful stage, two reasons to prevent your mistaking what had its cause in you. And yet you were beguiled, madame! You thought that my love for you was only the fancy of a boy, a hasty growth of springtime which would die and wither away before the fall of the leaves, something like a few extra drops of blood in my veins. And if your words were true, it shows error and humility for which I admire you; for you must therefore be an exception among

women, and it is always grand to be an exception. But in that case, men must have given you the right to treat them with the greatest generosity of scorn; you must entertain most horrible distrust for sentiments of devotion to have been so impious in the face of my love!

"Alas, madame! I ignore the whole of your past! I know nothing of you, except that I love you—and how distractedly! Your past, I know, has nothing to do with all this. I ought not and will not invoke it. But you, madame, you, do you want me to curse it in the only manifestation that remains of it, in the personification thereof that is perhaps the most dear to you, your daughter, who is no longer the beloved companion of my childhood; your daughter, who is no longer Camilla for me, but your child and that of *another;* your daughter, whom you will make me detest!

"Does what I write now astonish you, madame? I said I would leave your past alone. Oh! often, as I pictured it, I felt my heart bursting beneath the grip of jealousy—a silly, absurd, but implacable jealousy! I was strong enough to silence it; I hid it, I locked it up, I stifled it in the depths of my being. It had bitten me, lacerated and torn

me, but I closed its jaws with my bleeding hands. I trampled it beneath my wounded feet! What reproach had I to make to you? None. What had I to fear? Nothing. Ah, it was truly madness. Did you suspect me of these fits of fury? How many times, but above all during these last few days, as you saw the pallor of my brow and my sunken eyes, you said to me, in those motherly tones I hate, and which you always use with me: 'My poor Allan, what harm you do to yourself!' God in heaven! You thought perhaps that in the solitude of my bed I gave way with frenzy to the feelings that each night I carried away from you. You thought that you intoxicated the youth's body, and did not torture the man's heart. Blind woman, if you believed that; if you did not think of the devastation that the idea of a remembrance, of a single remembrance not destined for it, can make in a passionate soul!

"Never, madame! no, never, would I have mentioned this jealousy to you, if you had not increased it lately, perhaps despite yourself. Unwittingly? No! you are too intelligent. No! there is on your brow the mark of the science of life, and its anguish too strongly impressed for you not to know what I suffer, and what makes me suffer.

Yet were you not already once mistaken about my love? Did you not take it for childishness, which my imagination alone transformed into suffering? Might you not have been still mistaken? That is what I said to myself. But I caught your glance fixed upon me so often with such a singular expression; I saw it so well, and I understood it so badly, that I ask you myself what I ought to think of you? You see perfectly well that I speak of the present, madame, and not of the past!

"The more I love you, madame, the more I grow distant towards Camilla, the poor little girl I loved like a sister. During the first moments of the love you divined, although you misjudged its power, I found a vague resemblance, far away, indefinite, but delicious, in her face, to the face of her mother. Had she been less innocent, perhaps the kisses that, as we played together, I would lengthily press upon her eyelids might have troubled her rest. Mad dreamer that I am! I loved Camilla because she was your daughter. I imagined you at her age. In my thoughts I made believe to be your companion of childhood, and I found unheard of happiness in saying *'toi'* when speaking to her. Ah! these insensate delights made me

guilty at the bottom of my soul, but guilty all alone, be reassured! The unknowing child felt none of my ardour through the armour of her innocence. On my knees, where she often sat after long walks together, she was naïve, and as merry as with you. I was silent, I looked in her eyes and sought for yours. All troubled, I kissed her hair, her hair impregnated perchance with the same perfume which is exhaled by the tresses I have never touched. I asked her if she loved you, and where you had kissed her that morning, and I pursued a vestige of the maternal kiss on the fresh, tranquil, and pure face, and she, used to my caresses, said to me, as she would have said to you: 'Yes! kiss my eyes, to cure them, for the azure of the sky hurt me, as I looked too long to catch the shuttlecock on my battledore.' When we had chased the butterflies in the garden, I would take her up and carry her, and I felt her arm through the thin linen of her frock against my naked neck that she embraced. I said to myself that she was of your flesh, that the blood coursing in the veins of that arm was your blood, and I shut my eyes as I carried her, experiencing ineffable voluptuousness.

"But such moments did not last long. The en-

chantment faded as my love for you manifested itself still more. The child was no substitute for the woman. *She was the mocking-bird, but not the nightingale!* I still played with Camilla, but the charm was gone. She came beneath the willows at the water's edge, where I passed my days in thinking about you, whom I had seen, sitting or standing in the drawing-room, and of whom, in such attitudes, I would dream indefinitely, only thinking of interrupting my reverie to go and look upon you again—my heart and eyes full of you. In Camilla I sought for you ever. But there were her bursts of laughter, her waspish waist, her boyish breast—no! that was not you, so imposing, so serious, with the strong, yielding bust, and your large, wide shoulders, in the black gauze of your open dress, like ripe fruit in a transparent basket. No! she was not you, and I knew it full well. Insanity of the heart! miserable madness! The look of her eyes, an echo of yours, I began to find too tender. Thus did I tear myself away from all I had idolised, because my love had grown quicker than that little girl. And in her impuberty, I thought she was audacious to dare to resemble you in whose swelling bosom life beat fully, as the tide on the shore as it is about to recede! Poor star! of

which the sun of my dreams drowned the light of its brilliancy, although this devouring glare and this timid gleam were both composed of the same rays.

"The pain of my imagination, of which Camilla was the involuntary cause, had lasted some time, when one day when you had been harder than ever towards my intoxicated heart; one day when you had eclipsed the young women, who all around me were set down as beautiful, and who passed the summer at the Willows, Camilla, giddy and joyous, came troubling my fiery daydreams beneath the tree where I had taken refuge. She had a flower, a bee, I know not what, to show me. I sent her away like the child she was. I was ill-tempered with her. Since that day I have been always more and more so. That was because an idea—a frightful idea!—began to dawn in my mind and plunged deeply into my heart. Ah! madame, how I loved you!

"It is impossible that you do not know this fatal idea, and yet at the hour when you wiped my eyes with your handkerchief, when you allowed me to remain near you, believing, with your superb and execrable experience, that this overflow of sensibility which poured out over you would be turned

away and soon inundate some younger creature—in that fatal moment I still hid that bitter idea. I hid it in my heart, by placing my two hands over it. Feeble, and in tears in front of you, nothing transpired through my sobs, and you did not suspect that the student, the child, the dreamer, the witless boy who wept there at your feet nevertheless hid from you grief that might have broken the heart of a man!

"It would have died there, madame. Yes, I would have courageously buried it, whatever might have been the fate of my love, if since that same day when you forced Camilla to come back to me after my coldness had driven her away, you had not found pleasure in covering her with caresses before me. I thought your conduct strange, inconceivable, impenetrable, since I could not explain it but by lowering you, and that was impossible for me. I accepted this suffering coming from you in gratitude for not having been banished, and because you had put up with my love. But this morning a word that escaped has put an end to my courage. Remember when we came home after our walk on the banks of the Douve? You looked at Camilla, more lovely than usual by the exercise and the heat. Her face, burnt by the sun, showed up

admirably, enhanced by the black velvet of her flat, round Tam-o'-Shanter cap. She had twisted her light scarf about her neck like a cravat to preserve her skin from the ardour of the sun. Her head-dress, inclined over her ear, and her improvised necktie, made her look more masculine than usual. You gazed lengthily at her, saying nothing, and then you exclaimed, embracing and kissing her: 'Ah! how like your father!' There was so much soul in your tone, so much passionate affection in this sudden caress, so much proud maternity in both such remembrances evoked in a second, that I grasped the horrible certainty that had only appeared to me in rapid, doubting flashes, and I fled, so as not to reveal the inward upheavals that your words had caused in me!

"All day I wandered near the Château, a prey to contrary agitation, to fits of rage, and bursts of tears, as painful as death's agony. I only came home after having made up my mind to write to you. You are so much my sovereign, the mere sight of you so tightens my chain, I tremble so in front of you, that I find courage to write what I could not tell you. You must not see a reproach in this letter, madame. Reproaches belong to him only who has the right to make them. Reproach

goes from him who is betrayed to the traitor. But I have no rights, and you could not betray me, since you have promised me naught and given me nothing, not even a hope, not even faith in the duration of the feelings I have for you! Oh! madame, I was worthy of pity, but you were not guilty! In accusing you I should have been not only unjust, but insane. But I desired that he of whom you have made perhaps something like Cherubino at the feet of his beautiful godmother, and with whom you have always remained respectable and maternal, I desired that you should drag him up from such a low depth in your mind, by knowing him better, if only at least to pity him with another kind of pity than that with which you felt moved when he sobbed at your feet.

"How deeply you have wounded me, madame! Why did you not drive me from your house? Why did my tears soften you? Why did you fear to afflict me? Why did you wait for my love to be greater, stronger, more deeply rooted, to impose upon me pain that I can no longer support? Now that I have told you a little more fully how I love you, what resolution will you take regarding me? I do not wish to place myself as a barrier between you and your daughter, but I ask never more to

witness that tenderness to which you had not accustomed me. Ah! the imagination thereof is quite cruel enough! To those torments you had no need to add those of the reality that I had never suspected. You need not fear to be generous, charitable, magnanimous with me; I shall always be sufficiently unhappy!"

VI.

"I thought so, but I was not sure," she said, after having read this letter of precocious passion. Madame de Scudemor had just retired to rest, and, preoccupied, had not drawn over her shoulders the silken coverlet that she pressed with her naked feet. Her light, white night-robes enveloped her in their long, undulating folds. Leaning on her elbow, she read the letter of Allan de Cynthry again, and as she went through it by the light of her night-lamp, she bit the pink nail of her forefinger. Her vast and slightly prominent brow, where so many thoughts had passed, appeared as pallid as death in that darkened apartment, only lit up by the vacillating and luminous flicker showing through the alabaster of a lamp hanging from the ceiling. Madame de Scudemor's face, preoccupied, showed no inward emotion. It was entirely bathed in its habitual calm. The crease between her eyebrows, which seemed like a contraction, was only a figure, but a terrible one, denoting the Countess's age, brutally stamped on the forehead where

it would soon become deeper. But no other expression than that of the coming age appeared in the large eyes of the Countess de Scudemor. Allan had rightly noticed that Camilla had inherited those eyes. But those of the child sparkled with that fiery moisture which is so sweet, and those of the mother with the dry flame that is so violent.

Through the open window could be seen a pall of blue-black hue, studded with gold. It was the sky, shining with the thousand clusters of diamonds formed by the stars. The night was profound. In the distance the silent marsh. There was not the least breeze, and the clock discreetly acknowledged the universal silence by its measured, imperceptible ticking.

After a quarter of an hour's immobility and thought, Yseult de Scudemor rose, put her naked feet in her slippers, and threw back a black velvet mantle, forgotten on the back of an armchair, over the nearly transparent muslin that covered her frame; then, taking her night-light, she sat down in front of a *secrétaire*, which she opened. At that moment she was majestically beautiful. She harmonised in such extraordinary sympathy with the magnificent night that surrounded her, that Al-

lan's love would have been understood by all who could have seen her thus, albeit the most sensual. Women of forty only shine out between midnight and one o'clock. Those who have not seen them at that moment can give no opinion. "It is the hour of death," says the old ballad. Thus does the vision of Youth, rosy, melancholy phantom more beautiful and touching than life itself, spring from the grave for a few moments until the pale, golden morning dawn finds naught but the wild pallor, the tired eyes, the visible wrinkle, every taint—all the vengeances of the Day that sparkles joyfully, because that woman, at last humiliated, was for a long time as handsome as the Day itself!

She wrote. From time to time she passed her hand over her hair, in smooth bands on the temples, as her pen flew.

A door opened in Madame de Scudemor's apartment. Suddenly a head appeared through the door ajar.

"Are you ill, mamma?" said Camilla, whose crystal voice, softened by the velvet of her lips, tinkled deliciously in the dumbness of the night. "I heard your step. I thought you might want me."

"No, thank you, my child. Go back to bed, and

take care not to catch cold," answered Madame de Scudemor, as she continued to write.

When she had finished, she went to the window, which she closed, after having gathered a bouquet of the jessamine that grew around it, and returning to bed, soon fell asleep. Nature was accomplishing its laws slowly and silently without a troubled ripple, without a shuddering wave to throw up on the surface of that ocean a little emotion torn from the abysses of the soul, or a speck of murmuring foam, or a fragment of seaweed detached from the rocks of the Past, and whose lofty peaks now having disappeared, cast not a shadow over a restful life.

VII.

MADAME DE SCUDEMOR TO ALLAN.

"Yes, you are right, Allan! Why have your tears softened me? He alone knows who has fashioned the heart of woman. At the latter extremity of life, buffeted by men and events, my wounds healed by reflection and scorn, I thought I was proof against all for ever, and now come tears again, those tears of which I have seen so many shed which were merely the outcome of abominable hypocrisy, and which prevented me from sending you from my side. Ah! the armour of woman is always faulty just over the heart. If you had been a man, perhaps I should not have been seized with pity. But at your age there is no deceit. A youth is true. To be true is almost to be pure; it is to be the contrary of all I have seen, and—may I say it?—of all I have loved. That is probably why, Allan, your tears made me give way.

"And then the superstition of grief was added to my pity. I have suffered so much, my young

poor chance must be supposed to exist, and often it is wanting. But if even this supposition is impossible, can such debauchery of human nature be styled passion, and is it not rather a shameful and incurable aberration dignified by that name?

"You will go away, Allan, that is certain now. I would sooner you suffered a little while from the effects of your youth, which will compensate you later on, than let you run the risk of frightful regret, and myself be exposed to eternal remorse! I am no longer allowed to be frivolous, and I do not believe I have much vanity left in my heart. Go, then, you must, cruel boy, since you were not satisfied with the maternal friendship of a woman of my age! But to make—not your parting—but your sojourn far from me less painful, I shall have courage enough to destroy your last hope—if you still have one left—unknowingly, in the darkest shadow of your heart. That last twinge of pain must I make you feel, so that you may pardon me for it, and thank me one of these days. That day is not far off, Allan. Then will you be cured, and I quite an old woman. The halo of youth will be playing round your head, and of that lambent glory of life there will be enough to spare one soft ray for my white hair."

VIII.

Two days had passed since that letter. No unusual event had taken place at the Château of the Willows. The hours linked themselves to the hours in the same ordinary way. As on preceding days, all lived that vague, happy-go-lucky, don't-care sort of life which is so enjoyable in the country. No one troubled about anybody else until eventide, when, all strolling done, everybody met in the big drawing-room. The young women who were there played the piano or the harp, all windows open in the moonlight, until somewhat late at night, or the talk was of Paris, about what would be done next winter, or concerning a new pamphlet. There is no necessity to describe this life. Everybody knows it.

In the midst of all the bodices where the flesh rose and fell in sweet repose among these dandies of the Boulevard des Italiens, and these pretty, pale little women, with almond eyes and Andalusian waists, worthy odalisques of sultans with worn-out hearts and bodies, a drama was being enacted.

And this rare thing was being played out between two characters, as between Pygmalion and his statue, and all these short-sighted eyes saw nothing through their glasses. Vanity must have made this assembly very stupid not to have caused at least a slight suspicion to stir up their bird-like brains as they looked upon Allan's face. To see him was to tremble. His pallor was of a greenish cast, and his handsome brow was downcast like that of a blasted being. He only came very late into the *salon* now, and Camilla alone heard her mother say to him sometimes in a whisper, lost in the noise of the general conversation:

"Allan, friend, take courage!"

He had been crushed by the blow given by the letter that Madame de Scudemor had written him. But by dint of suffering the soul is turned into bronze, and passion is also a form of the will. He felt, as yet confusedly, it is true, that he would brave the commands of the woman he adored, from whose empire he wished to free himself, in the very interest of his love. But he also felt there was no remedy for the cold and beneficent rationality that was opposed to him. The soul of that woman was shut, her destiny enclosed in iron bands; all was finished, as if the last shovelful

of earth had been thrown down. Nevertheless, he made up his mind that nothing should tear him away from the column of this tomb of sweet and icy marble—if it was a tomb, however, or more likely a sarcophagus, in which, alas! even the ashes were wanting.

He had scarcely understood the sense of the last lines of Madame de Scudemor's epistle. Nevertheless, he foresaw that she would speak to him once more for the last time. But he was absolutely resolved to become inflexible, to rebel against the ascendancy she possessed over his confused faculties. Delirium! delirium! Our passions are always measured by the cowardice which is their fruit.

One evening he went and sat on a sofa where she was, as ever caring little about what was said around her, but not absent-minded, and chatting with the indifference she showed for everything. Delicious impression caused by the presence of the loved one! For forty-eight hours Allan had absorbed centuries of anxiety and suffering, and his soul, thus saturated to the full, was annihilated suddenly in the depths of his sensual, bodily intoxication. He passed two hours, with his heart torn in tatters, his ears and thoughts devoted to

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times in the bosom of these half-closed blossoms a drop of the evening dew bore witness to the immaterial love of the Night in this celibacy of the sun. Touching symbol of many destinies! How many beings, also in the celibacy of the heart, keep a tear they have gathered, because never, alas! will any more be given them!

The night was dark. Allan sat on a bench, in the depth of this copse where the perfumed moisture obstinately impregnated the garments. Syringa, with its fragrance, which is so voluptuous as to be even painful, bloomed around him. A few miles from there, on the land side, for the Château and the garden of the Willows seemed like an isthmus, the point being the fen, a nightingale could be heard, and it was more melancholy still to hearken to these modulations of the bird's song, softened, velvet-like, by distance, and which alone broke the infinite silence of space, where now and then passed a dumb breeze.

But nature was a closed book for Allan. Through the network of the leaves he kept his eye upon the windows of the Château of the Willows, luminous specks in the obscurity. He anxiously awaited the moment when all should leave the *salon*, and each one retire to his apartment.

At the end of an hour he heard the approach of a firm and rapid step. To find the blood of his body one would have had to stab him right in the middle of his heart. All that he had was beating there.

"You are there, Allan, are you not?" said Madame de Scudemor, in tranquil tones.

An indistinct "Yes"—for emotion glues our voice in our throats so fast that we cannot tear it out—was all the reply that followed her question.

Under the trees nothing could be distinguished. She sat on a bench, a good way from him. Happily for her, he was only seventeen, and he loved her! But had he been older, or had he loved her less, if he had only by accident, in drawing near the bench, touched with his sleeve that arm he had so admired in the house, ah! how dearly she would have paid the imprudence of an appointment in the dark granted to a man who was dying with desire!

But he loved her with a true and timid love, with the first love of life. What ailed her, then, to be so madly imprudent? That the unhappy man was soon about to learn.

After an interval of silence, which seemed longer to him than the hour he had waited:

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"Two days have passed since I wrote to you," she said, "without changing aught of my resolutions. On the contrary, those forty-eight hours have made them firmer still. I promised you that to make estrangement less cruel I would cause you the last pain, salutary pain, and that I would poison our leave-taking with my disclosures. For when every hope is torn away the soul makes up its mind, and becomes resigned; but when it still hopes on, the malady becomes eternal, and desires are justified."

"It is useless!" he exclaimed, so as to form an answer, but he restrained himself.

Burning curiosity rose up within him. He was tired of the mystery. He wanted to know all, even what he feared the most. He was thirsty of details. She went on:

"Allan, you shall know my life. What I never intended to tell anyone, I am going to narrate to you, a boy of seventeen. What neither man nor woman has ever heard, you shall listen to. When that is done, I hope you will no longer love me. Or, if the impression that I have made upon you still lasts, it will gradually get weaker and weaker, and by absence finish by fading away entirely."

Then, with that tired and hoarse voice that he knew so well, and which in society only uttered colourless words, she began to tell her secrets, and draw forth from its hiding place a woman that the world knew not.

"I am not an Italian woman," she said, "but I was brought up in Italy, in the Convent of San Lorenzo, near Florence. One of my aunts confided me to the care of a friend of hers, the Superior of this nunnery. Of a truth, I think that she was well pleased to get rid of me, an orphan girl—a burden wanting care, watchfulness, and affection. I had lost my parents when a mere infant. I was to come into an immense fortune, and I received the most detestable education. Such were the only events of my life until the age of fifteen.

"But at fifteen, events are in our being. It is the dawn of life. On the other side of my fifteen years there is only emptiness and shadow, and I do not recollect that time any more than I can call to mind when I was in the cradle. I had been richly enough endowed with intelligence for it to escape unhurt from the inertia of my Southern education. Later on, I developed that common sense which helped me to judge life, and not to guess at it.

"Although of the land of the befeathered ladies whom Mademoiselle de l'Espinasse flagellated with her ardent scorn, there was in my inmost being more passion than in all these daughters of Italy whose childhood mingled with mine. Their complexions were darker than mine, the warmth of their glances assailed other eyes, as if to say: 'You seek my nakedness, as I desire to divine yours,' but my gaze had never that wantonness. Their eyelids would close now and then, like a mantilla slowly drawn to hide a budding breast, but my looks were frank and open. Their passion was a snake biting its tail. Mine was the serpent enfolding the trunk of the tree of knowledge to taste the forbidden fruit. They passed whole hours, their heads in their hands, with heaving breasts, a hot tear weighing down their silken eyelids, and stupefied by nameless trouble, blushing with desire at the least breeze that licked their neck in this lascivious Southern climate, they awaited the coming of night, with its dreams and all its delirium. Beloved hour, with its thrills, its solitude, and the fear of giving way to swooning pleasure beneath the curtains of the couch that kept all its secrets! Oh, for me already all this was too vague. In my case desire was more substantial. I whispered

the name of these troubled disorders to myself with bated breath, and I required something more to satisfy me than concentrated intoxication brought on by inhaling the white chestnut blossoms from which we fashioned diadems.

"My child, there is nothing beautiful in this world but what is pure! As I speak to you now, Allan, I feel no cowardly shame in letting you read in my past, and in crying out: 'Believe in the woman who seeks not to absolve herself! Purity is the only beautiful trait of our nature.' Love, that power of infinite devotion, is only superb because it purifies us! If there is aught more holy than a virgin of fifteen, it is a woman for whom all is no longer incomprehensible; and still more holy than her is she who has understood all, and for whom this comprehension has not been a pollution. Ah! at fifteen, when only a weak child, with merely our mother's cheek and an ivory crucifix to kiss, it is not very difficult to guard the precious treasure of purity, which, once lost, is never regained, and henceforward is replaced by nothing else. Well, Allan, at fifteen I had not even that, and my first love was deflowered in the bottom of my soul by my first friendship.

"When we have an ardent nature, Allan, and

imagination ripens, passion arises, troubling and embittering our most tender and innocent feelings. Instead of dreaming as they all did, I sought to live. Instead of the desire of love, with which they cradled and rocked themselves until inebriated, I rushed furiously towards love. I lived faster than they, and at the same time I lived more fully.

"Amongst the greatest dreamers of us all was a young Neapolitan girl, whose hair was fair, golden as leaves yellowed by autumn, and whose face and bosom were inundated as with the reflection of the light of those wild, waving tresses. She was certainly the most beautiful of us all. She was shorter than I, and thinner. The sun of her country had been revenged on her black eyebrows and eyelashes for not having been able to darken her resistant locks. Under the double ebony frame of her lashes was the contrast of her eyes, with their deadened blue pupils, resembling turquoises set in jet bracelets, and they were so sad that they never sparkled, and even her tears were never brilliant. The maddest idolatry for that young girl possessed me. But, Allan, if this exaggerated affection had simply been the friendship of one young girl for another, should I have told you how beautiful she

was? Should I have talked of anything else but of her heart?

"Is there, then, only one way to love, and can it be true that all the distinctions made in that intangible spot which we call our heart are chimeras and lies? Oh, then I could explain why I trembled when I approached her; why I blushed when she gazed at me with her sad azure eyes; why, in our games of blindman's buff, I found her out without touching her by the movement that rose in me as I approached her, and I was always drawn towards her. But she loved me, too, although she was always calm when we were together. Her caresses grew cold as I caressed her. If she blushed, I was not the cause. It was some vague hope, the germ of a world lying in the chaos of the future; it was the haste to find her soul a few days older; it was the insufficiency of all that satisfied me, who was richer and more unfortunate. She loved me, but how many times, beneath the flowering orange trees, both seated, I fainting with joy at her sight, while she did not even notice that her hand was in my palm, and that insatiably I kept on repeating: 'What are you thinking about?' Then she would recall from heaven the look of her eyes, where it had been lost like a bird on the ocean.

Her dear gaze! inanimate jetsam stranded in mine which devoured it; then came tears, such as I have never been able to shed, for my lips found them to be icy, as they sprung from between her lids, and I waited to gather them till they had flowed to her mouth.

"The state I was in was never made known to her; not that I ignored it myself, but because, as far as passion went, I was her elder sister. Yes, I could have explained to her what fermented so strongly in me, for I repeat that I knew all. I could have put a name to each of my guilty wishes and my insane desires, but unconquerable timidity always held me back. One night particularly, a night that was terrible, I passed, panting, with naked feet and disrobed frame, near the bed where she reposed in silence, and my trembling hand dared not touch her curtain, until my timidity brought me back exhausted to my bed. I was bashful because I was sensual. Modesty, Allan, is the peep o' day of passion, which begins with a blush in the soul as in the sky. Chastity is a pleasure which we hide, and which betrays us. It is the first pollution of womanly innocence.

"In like fashion I passed two years and three months. At the end of that time my aunt came

and fetched me and brought me back to France, where I was to be brought out. I had great grief at leaving San Lorenzo. Nevertheless, I wept less than the girl I loved. I was so certain that I was not necessary in her life, that the anguish of our farewell intermixed with a sensation of arid resignation. A feeling like mine was proudly exacting. I suffered only at being the schoolmate of her who was my idol. We promised to write to each other, and I departed.

"In France, all believed that if I returned so sad from Italy it was because I had left great friendships behind at the convent. My aunt also thought so, but she was soon undeceived. My sadness became inexplicable for her when, after the fifth letter dated from Florence, she saw I did not reply any more. Margarita's letters were her without herself—without her look, her hair, her breast; all I had idolized! Each time her letters brought me deception, disenchantment, grief mingling with disdain. At least, when I could still see her, I was able to believe that she guessed how I loved her by the eloquence of my embraces, by the violence of my glances! An imperious feeling of shame prevented me from confessing to her what would have made me guilty, for, perchance, I might have led

her astray. But, thanks to our friendship, as she understood it, I was able to enjoy pale pleasures that did not, however, satisfy me. When my arm was knotted round her neck, my bosom beating against her tranquil bust; when my gaze lit up the undulating curve of her brow, glistening like copper, with the flashing gleam of my eyes which she could never support, she did not repulse me. It is true, she talked to me but of frivolities, of a dress to be made, or a mantilla to be embroidered, or else she gave way to dumb reveries, but I was happy thus, and there we would remain for long hours. Now, what remained to me? What could I find in her letters? The chill expressions of vulgar emotions, convent gossip, and nothing more; for a young girl's reveries cannot be spoken aloud. Ah! such a little tortured me, and—as it was just as impossible for me to write to her what I had withheld when she made me drunk with her presence—I preferred to retire into the desolate and silent solitude of my remembrances.

"But remembrance at that age, which is yours, Allan, is not eternal. Margarita's image faded out of my thoughts little by little. I have sometimes asked myself how it is that we cannot break off with the loves that follow as we can with the

first love. As for the faculties that bubbled up in me, I tried to occupy them by the books from which I had been severed by my education, and by society that I did not yet know, but they found not in either one or the other the nourishment craved for so avidly, and I only understood one goal in a woman's life—happiness in love.

"Allan, I will not seek to lessen the abnegation of this narrative. In my aunt's circle was a crowd of young men who circled me with their homage. At this moment of my girlhood I merely experienced passing fancies, but to which the ardour of my disposition gave me the inward delights of sensuality. These handsome young fellows whom I fell in love with any evening, I have despised them all since, or rather, scorn killed the love that I was about to bestow on them. They were conceited fools, who possessed the power to make my voice change as they whispered their soft nothings, and to whom I abandoned myself in a crowded *salon*, or during the audacious liberty of the waltz, or in the course of half-tone chatting conversations, of all of which, perhaps, they went away and boasted to their odalisques of the opera ballet. Oh! if men knew what are the misapprehensions of the young girls in society, at no price would they ac-

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cept these coarse virginities. They would not have them as mistresses, nor as wives, and they would repudiate them all as much for the sake of pride as for love.

"I travelled through what are called the best years of young womanhood, beguiled by these enthusiasms of a day which are the smarting shame of following hours. I did not feel bold enough to entrust my life to these men to whom I reproached myself for having devoted an evening. Vanity was avenged for my scorn by accusing me of vanity. Alas! I accomplished the vengeance of these petty wounded souls upon my own self. I thirsted for love, and there was none for me. I waited. To wait, is not that almost always the whole of life? But finally the despair of waiting seized me violently. I was young, strong, and powerful, and I asked myself if life was not slipping away from me in all these days that, ghostlike, glided by, one by one, without love. This is a cruel moment that women know well. The lost days go by and leave regret which is not even remembrance. The soul has strange and distressful moments. We say, like the mad woman, 'It will be to-morrow!' and the morrow comes and goes, but not the morrow we dreamt. Less happy than the insensate

girl, we are able to ponder over yesterday when we were deceived, and the faith in the morrow is daily weakened more and more. Ah! it is not always the joy of being beautiful that makes us throw into the mirror the long glance you have noticed. Sooner is it often melancholy that prevents us from turning away our eyes, our beauty having so often misled us that we have the awful fear of losing it, because we all want to be loved.

"Was it this secret fatigue of hope, this ardour which fed and increased itself, this impatience of happiness, which fixed my sentiments for Horace de Scudemor? I was in such haste to find happiness through love, I was so greedy of the belief that I was loved, that I shut my eyes not to see this man, so as not to have to judge him like the others, and to be obliged once more to destroy all my illusions. I carried such stupidity as far as I could, making it into heroism. I accepted words of love of which the desire of my heart formed all the eloquence. I had faith in him and became his wife. It is easy to be deceived when we are so willing. Nevertheless, I palpitated with such vitality, and men proclaimed how beautiful I was, that Horace, like myself, could be mistaken in his love. Whatever may have been the case, I thought

I was happy for ever. Our honeymoon was a devouring sun, and Camilla bears on her already sensual brow the mark of the furnace from whence she came.

"But possession tired my husband, disgusted him, and soon I was neglected. A bitter feeling of humiliation seized me; but I did not shed many tears, and rage conquered the weak despair of abandonment. Dating from that epoch, I esteemed myself superior to a common soul. I had lived in Horace's love, I had tasted the delights of marriage in the most profound intimacy, and this exhaustible love dried up through habit, and these unspeakable joys were to exist no more! My imagination, more than my heart, met with one of those atrocious deceptions for which there is no cure—an incurable sore poisoning even the future. I suffered, but I hid my sufferings. Another woman would have persecuted with sobbing scenes the man who would thus have betrayed her; I held my tongue. My husband was only a vulgar libertine. I would not do him the honour to be jealous of his abject infatuations; but I no longer allowed him to brush against my dress when we both passed through the same doorway. Pain found me full of resistance, since my grief had only just begun.

At night I paid dearly for the stoicism of the daytime, and I was seized with fits of fury that made me roll naked on the floor. But by day I enveloped my convulsive sufferings in velvet and laughter, and this purple suited me so well, and my smiles were such deep impostures, that my seeming happiness insulted other women in a way that was nearly as wounding for them as my insolent beauty. Happiness is a pitiable thing, Allan, since it cannot be distinguished from such frightful monkey tricks! Is it because nothing is true that everything can be so perfectly imitated? Thus pique made me swallow all my sobs, and my vanity was fortified by pride.

"One of the most frightful symptoms of suffering is that it indefinitely spreads out its horizon, forming the immense centre of a circumference which is nowhere and everywhere. Then comes a new pain to teach us that the wound was not quite so large, that the evil was not so great. So are we cruelly, ironically, implacably disabused by the dishonour of our despair! That I learnt later. But then I thought my heart would never get over the blow that had struck it. I buried myself within myself. Alas! that strength I had found to support the misfortune of my marriage ought

to have caused me to suspect that I was not *blasée*, that there were still ordeals to be passed—a second purgatory surpassing all I had endured—and that life would drag on a little longer before coming to an end. My love for Horace had been almost voluntary, so great had been my precipitation to believe in it. I did not know of the passion we struggle against, and which hurries us on as with divine power. I knew it not, and—poor ignorant fool that I was—I said to myself that all the sources of happiness at which I had quenched my thirst had no greater abysses than those I had measured as I fell into them.

"I had passed the terrible age of thirty. Thirty, for most women, is old age with a young and wild heart, and the heart fears that age even more than our vanity. But for me it seemed as if that formidable epoch was a moment of munificence and liberality. It is true that I had not been cast in the mould whence issued those fragile beings whose delicate organisation I often envied so as to be able to die sooner—those ephemeral women who faint under one caress, and who have only one sorrow in life: that they are forced to resuscitate to submit to a second. For such as they, the age of thirty dulls the white plumage of the complexion;

a baby breaks down their figure; a drop of amber is wanting to make the evanescent brilliancy of those perishable eyes eternal, when one tear puts out their light. But I was not such a fragile creature, Allan. I was not so immaterially handsome. Thus my beauty was not at its dying agony at thirty!

"On the contrary, in spite of my horrible deceptions, in spite of the cruel restraint I had imposed upon myself, I profited by the infinite air of life. I breathed it with immense facility. In this feeling of plenitude and power which I drew in from all around me, I understood that there was no human being ever created more in unison with immortal nature than myself, being of a stronger substance, and not less handsome, than other women; and unconquerable grief had no more printed its claw upon my bosom than the tiny hand of a child could leave a trace of its nails on the neck of a bull. Oh, Allan, how inwardly deep are the joys of strength! But when that strength cannot defend us against fate we are as unhappy through the fact of that force as through that of destiny.

"And that is what soon happened to me, my dear Allan. Monsieur de Scudemor had a nephew, a few years younger than myself. That young man

had always shown aversion for his uncle's career. Rich, and completely independent, he travelled about, with no determined end. I only knew him through having heard of his wit and the elegance of his manners. Monsieur de Scudemor introduced him to me. He possessed that timidity of Englishmen who never make the slightest advances. With this excessive shyness, in one hour he became my master, and to such an extent that if he had said 'Follow me!' no matter where, I should have obeyed.

"He confessed to me since that I had more astonished than seduced him, and that he could not understand how he had fallen in love with me. As for me, it was at one and the same time fever, insomnia, delirium immediately. All that I had felt hitherto was not to be compared with what I then experienced. It was not solely in intensity that my sensations were different; I was mad, I was ill, and only through love."

IX.

She stopped. Her voice assumed a strange tone. Was it the fatigue of having talked so long in the night air? At first, Allan had been seized with surprise. He hardly seemed to recognise Madame de Scudemor and such discourse, her language generally being as colourless as her brow. Then the interest of the recital had been too poignant to let his astonishment die away. Cold sweat stood out on his temples as he frenziedly bit his silken handkerchief. Infernal curiosity, for jealousy made him inquisitive, dilated his eyes inordinately, and his pupils sparkled in the darkness. He directed their gaze upon the woman engulfed in the night, whose voice he heard no more, that low and deep voice that made his heart bleed.

"Yes! it was love this time, Allan," she continued, "a love after which there are but ashes in the heart. If such a love can come to an end, why should one believe in immortality?

"Everything favoured this passion of mine. Octave was able to visit me when he chose. Our

family connections were too close to allow the vanity of Monsieur de Scudemor to be awakened by rumours which seemed as though they ought never to exist. Thus I could see Octave at every hour of the day. When he delayed his coming I sent for him, and I made indecent reproaches to him with a blush on my face which was more indecent still. When he caught me a few minutes earlier than usual, I was ready to throw myself into his arms or at his feet out of sheer gratitude.

"This love, teaching me a joy of which I had no idea, condemned me at the same time to sufferings that the most intoxicating, voluptuous pleasures could not pay for. He poisoned the remembrance of the past, that sharp blade which always remains in the wound. Margarita was a dream which had remained a dream; and, since her, my illusions had been hoarded up in the bosom they agitated, and had only peeped out in the obscene touches of the ballroom, during a waltz or a quadrille, authorised by all mothers. The pressure of our partners makes us think of the life that is beginning for us, and seems to whisper to us with horrible significance. Then my love, betrayed by Horace, who had not been able to exhaust it; the delight of my marriage, in which I had rev-

elled—all this horrified me, all frightened me! I regretted that I was not the purest of women, so as to throw the flower of my innocence into the midst of the romance of my love, to give it to him to breathe, to sully, to trample under foot! Ah! women are adulteresses—they are all so—but do they know, as I do, what this treacherous happiness can conceal?

"You see, Allan, adultery was not solely for me that of the virgins of society, this oblivion of a secret sentiment, this profanation of a marriage mysteriously accomplished in the depths of our soul. I have told you what had been the successive prostitutions of my feelings. Adultery, for me, was still worse. The bond seemed stronger; it was broken all the same. Believe me, Allan, it was not the certainty that I was doing wrong, that I was forgetting what man's morality entitles duty, that prevented my passion from making me happy! Ah! it possessed all that was wanting of poetry or sublime allurement to hinder vanity or remorse from daring to slip a timid complaint among the repeated and increasing echoes of my conscience. But my life had been sapped at its base. I was unhappy, because adulterous. I was not so on account of man and his morality, but simply because

I was an adulteress. Is not that profoundly sad? Adultery with its own hands lacerated the entrails of love. Ah! one may laugh, if strong-minded, at the reproach for having betrayed a once-loved being; for the matter only concerns oneself in the depths of the soul. But it is the contradiction of contradictions to betray the one we *do* love, to betray him in advance, to find that we have betrayed in the past the creature we should love in the future; to never be able to give him who takes possession of your life and your thoughts but the leavings of soul and body, but the crumbs fallen from the feast enjoyed by another. This is the worst of human grief, the most devouring of all ardent humiliations. You find yourself criminal towards him whom you adore! Pale victim, you tremble beneath his caresses because they are not powerful enough to make you forget that you were formerly guilty. Thinking of this in the arms that bind you, while on that breast you rest the head which can no longer sleep or attain intoxication, your life, as it was passed before you knew him, appears incessantly to fill you with desolation, to remind you that you are merely a mutilated thing, a fragment, a cup bearing the mark of all the lips that have quenched their thirst therein, a miserable

woman who has not the right to say to the man whom she madly adores that fatal word, in which love concentrates the eternity of God himself: 'I am all thine!'

"Oh, Allan! Allan! all those women who do not deserve that scorn should be spat in their face, if it was mud and not spittle that spouts from the lips. all those women have at least suspected this suffering. For all, even in the bosom of the most absorbing passion, there are moments when alone they bow down their humiliated head and remember; or they hide their face, with blinding tears, of which they keep the secret, in the hollow of the beloved breast. But, like me, have they exhausted the acrimony of such intolerable torture, without the happiness of love being able to interrupt it and make them forget it?

" 'Being so happy, why are you sad?' Octave sometimes said to me. Alas! I would make him believe that I was overwhelmed by too much joy. I should never have dared to tell him what caused my fits of frightful dreariness, suddenly springing up amidst the embraces of our union, and the smiles of our love. Great God! ought there to be a secret between two beings sharing the same bed; a secret which in the night, with heart beating against

heart, one reveals not and which causes tears? By telling what afflicted me to Octave, I feared to sully the feelings that he manifested for me. I feared to awaken his scorn. Now and then I imagined that he saw clearly into my past life, and that he imposed silence to inevitable jealousy out of delicacy. Above all, the idea of his regret ate into my soul. But he was not like you, Allan. I never acquired the certainty that what appalled me really existed. I often studied him with one of those glances which plunge into a soul a thousand fathoms deep, like the sounding lead in the ocean, while he nursed my daughter on his knee, for I no longer cradled her on my lap, and among all the caresses he showered upon her, I never saw anything betraying the heroic sacrifice I supposed. Ought not this to have calmed me, destroying my uneasiness, making me more inclined for that happiness spoilt by all my ideas? But the depth of my disposition is such that I could never again tear out the pain which had once settled therein. At that moment of my life I could not look upon a young girl's face without anguish. In her presence I cast my eyes down more than she did, but unlike her, it was not out of modesty.

"How incomprehensible is our heart, Allan!

Would you believe that in my thoughts I reproached Octave for not being unhappy, through all that made me unhappy? I was astonished at his tranquillity. It lowered him in my eyes. That was the first ray that died out of the halo round his head, the first sting of the asp hidden in my heart. You, Allan, you whom I have not loved, you who hate Camilla because for you she resumes a frightful date of my past history, you would not have had that apathy. Your love would have been infinite. It would have embraced all time. Then the passion of Octave was not like this! For him caresses sufficed, and the moment of pleasure overpowered reflection. But all deep passions are well thought over; I learnt that from what I felt in mine for him.

"The farther I advanced, the more this speck of scorn, painful and uneasy, spread out and corroded my love. My passion assumed a new form. Enthusiasm was gone. But enthusiasm is but the froth of a generous wine, and the most ardent, burning liquors remain stagnant in the cup instead of foaming.

"I shall not narrate to you, Allan, the extraneous events that intermixed with my love. What matters it that I lived in the different European

cities where my husband was sent? Octave had become his uncle's secretary; he never left me; I took him with me wherever I went. I need not describe to you the successive phases of a feeling which, dead, walled up my soul with blocks of granite.

"This feeling was incrusted in my being. Exasperated by the most humiliating grief that can be—the conscience of the humiliating past—it seemed to gain more sharp and voracious energy by this pain. Grief is like the bitter marrow of a lion; one may truly term this poignant nourishment which makes our love unconquerably devouring, a divine or infernal transubstantiation. The disdain succeeding to this grief was of no avail against the passion of which it increased the ardour. By this scorn, I did not struggle against the love, nor against this scorn by my love. A strange situation in which I lived for years! Do you understand now, Allan, what a woman I must have been, since my love fought so long against this supreme happiness, against suffering and scorn in my soul where the passions had hatched themselves like the vipers of springtide which, to make their brood, do not wait for the leaves to bud in the bushes?

"It was written in my destiny that I should only find disillusion and impotency as the result of all my affections. You foresee already that Octave also, he who had adored me, whom I had hedged round with so many dreams, golden stars of a woman's thoughts with which she incessantly decorates the firmament of her passion, would one day slip away from me who still loved him so much. You are right, my friend! There was yet this grief for me, yet this chalice to be emptied to the dregs. While his love lasted, he had admired me as much as he idolised me. I was his cult, his religion, and if I had not swayed him by my caresses, he would never have spoken to me but on his knees. Well now, here is something that resembles the refinements of the cruelty of Fate, an executioner's buffooneries in the part played by God! for it was Octave's love that died away the first. Enthusiasm, respect, and admiration were powerless to keep his passion in his heart, while mine escaped from disdain to survive that which everything—is it not true?—ought to have prevented dying so soon.

"And that is what prevents me from believing now in the lasting of the affection which is proclaimed as the most eternal. Grief has worn me

out to the last fibre, dried up the last drop, and in this breast, still full of vitality, I carry but the corpse of my heart. On one day of dry and burning pain—it was a day when I had not yet ceased to love him—I found repose in the thought of suicide. The idea of Camilla restrained me. Ah! my friend, the day when the thought of death springs uppermost is not the worst day in one's life. As long as action is possible, misfortune has not had the last word; we are always interested in ourselves. But when we have a suspicion that there is not even a resource of repose and peace in the grave, it means that we are still on the earth, but we no longer live."

She stopped a second time. Her story, where forgotten material facts gave a deeper, darker, and more sombre and striking shade to all this stormy psychology, moved the jealous and tormented soul of Allan with compassion, without tenderness or relief. Suddenly the moon rose and threw its white, smooth rays through the branches. The shadows that enveloped Allan and Madame de Scudemor lifted themselves from their two faces, as if black masks had been removed. They saw each other. Allan seemed stupefied. But genius in tears, as might be the Genius of the experience

of life, was enthroned on the brow of Madame de Scudemor. Her eyes sparkled, but dry as ever, and on her lips there was a smile—the bitter smile of solitary irony.

"Such is my life, Allan," she resumed, "with the exception of what I suffered before killing this last love. I did not kill it; it died, without my making an effort to destroy it. My heart had been devoured when it died. But what time it took to die! I spare you these details. They are useless. Only do you find it very strange that I no longer believe in the duration of passion?"

"And Octave?" rejoined Allan, in a curt and feverish tone.

"Octave?" she replied, with her usual calm. "I was told that he died, married somewhere. I once had his portrait. The warmth of the heart that beat for him had faded all the colours. It was only recognisable for me. I was cowardly enough to wait to break it until I no longer loved him. But it had been carried so long in my bosom that my breast has kept its imprint. Do you think that there exist lips powerful enough to efface it?"

She took the hand of the unfortunate young man.

"Leave me!" said he, shuddering, with the hard accents of resentment.

She obeyed, and without temper or sadness.

"Yes, Allan!" she answered, "you speak rightly. I ought to leave you now. I have tortured the love you have for me, but it is artistic torture that will cure you. Reality has touched with its irresistible breath the reveries of your imagination and the illusions of your heart. See what I am, Allan! See if I am worth your youth! I should spoil it, and even my egotism would not profit by it.

"Oh, Allan, never love but a young girl, that adorable mystery of which one lifts up every veil little by little! On these conditions only is happiness possible. If they are wanting you are exposed to inconceivable torments. Need I insist, Allan? A poor little caress to Camilla, has it not wounded you to the quick? When jealousy bites at the breeze, it is even more furious than if it had reason to exist, and it brings humiliation, because the unseizable past becomes the rival you cannot punish.

"And then what allurements could resist the thought that the loved woman has spent the sum of love she had to give—that you could never revive the most weak reminiscence of her youth!

Ah! if I gave way to you to-day, what a morrow there would be, when you would doubtless be tired and disgusted! Sully yourself not, young man, with my pollutions! For you would not even have the sad profit of polluting me a little more; all your passion would fail there. I order you to go away to-morrow."

"No, madame!" he answered, with the impetuosity of long concentrated rage. "No, no! I'll not depart. If you think you have done a great thing in telling me your story of despair, I do not appreciate your sublimity, and I will have none of your abnegation! How do I know, madame, if even you have spoken the truth? How do I know if, out of kindness for me, and to cure me of my love, as you say, you have not calumniated yourself? But no!" he added, "you spoke the truth; a lie would not have made me suffer so much!"

And he stopped, beneath the weight of his conviction that she had spoken veraciously. He appeared affrighted by the energy he showed.

But she was not moved by this resistance, upon which she had not counted.

"Sleep on it, Allan," said she, in her deep, grave voice. "To-morrow, perhaps, you will feel the wish to depart without seeing me again. Otherwise, I

shall command you to leave the Château, and so plainly and positively, Allan, that out of pride alone you will not fail to obey me!"

"Pride!" he retorted. "Ah, little care I for my pride! But, madame, my pride is to remain here in spite of you! I shall stay here. Something stronger than myself binds me, roots my feet to this soil. Why do you speak of the future to me? You who are encircled everywhere with disenchantment; it suits you finely to speak to me of a future! My future is to be where you are! My future is to love you, and when I am tired of this hopeless love, to blow out my brains at your feet!"

His voice broke into sobs. He would have liked to stifle them, but little used to struggle against himself, he could no longer retain them.

"Oh, my poor friend, you know not what you say!" she replied, with irresistible tenderness. "Pardon me if I hurt your feelings when I said just now, and repeated to you, that I would force you to depart. I obeyed the fear of fate. Alas! we make ourselves very unhappy. You, Allan, have tears to shed. I have no more! All mine have been taken. But believe that I also suffer much, and pardon me!"

There was balm in that relenting voice. Allan's

head fell, less from the crushing blow than through renewed confidence, on Madame de Scudemor's shoulder.

"Yes! place your head thus, my child," said she, becoming once more maternal, "and weep—sate yourself with your tears. Alas, you will not always weep! Did I not tell you that ours would be a cruel parting? Ah, for pity's sake, abridge it by going away to-morrow! See here, I will speak no more of you, but if you have a little pity for me, who would reproach myself as for a crime for having spoilt your life without having made you taste the sterile compensation of sensuality—be good, be generous, by going away! Pay me thus for the sad courage I needed to set forth to you my humiliating biography. This history, as you now know it, is it not an impassable barrier between our two destinies? You no longer love Camilla? My caresses have made her ugly in your eyes, because beneath these caresses you placed something that was not addressed to her alone, and yet you yearn for her mother, her who had her from another man than you! And even then, if there was only that man who had inflicted grief and sensuality upon me; but you know that he has not been the only one I have loved, and who has dried up the

sources of my sensations. Ah, seek not to quench your thirst with the sand of this exhausted fountain! Allan, do not believe me when I said I would drive you from my house! It was a trick; I hoped such a threat would decide your departure. But, as you are a man, shall I go on my knees before you to ask you to go?"

And from the bench on which she was seated, she slipped down kneeling before Allan, who rose as if affrighted, seeing her thus so lowered. The admirable woman well knew that the honour of Allan's love was at stake if he left her on her knees before him, and that, for this heart of seventeen, virgin of all egotism, degradation would follow at once if he hesitated. She had brought him up. She knew the nobility of his disposition.

"I shall remain thus, Allan," said she, "until you promise me to go to-morrow. Do you think it is my place to remain like this before you?"

He promised with despair, but without hesitation. His murmuring will was conquered by the sublime comedy that Madame de Scudemor had coldly played.

Then she rose with serenity, as she had been noble when she knelt.

"I have your word now," she continued; "I am easy."

And she led him away in the direction of the Château.

What Allan had just promised had the same effect on him as a death sentence on a vulgar soul. He was only obscurely conscious of some frightful, painful evil. He walked with bowed head, leaning on the arm of Madame de Scudemor. They returned slowly and silently—alas, had they not said to each other all they had to say?—along the vast, straight alleys of the garden. The moon, reflected by the sloping glass of the hothouse roof, sparkled like a thousand stalactites mingled with the sand of the paths, figuring precious stones on a ground of pale gold. There was naught but immobility and light in the large garden, with the exception of the black group formed by these two nocturnal strollers, that frightened imagination might have taken for wanderers from beyond the grave. Both together, they almost presented the fantastic appearance of a vision, as the woman supported and dragged the young man along. One might have thought, seeing the weakness of the youth, and the infinite calm of the woman, that she was more likely to be his Fate than his Providence.

The Château was bathed in the moonlight, and seemed as if sleeping. All reposed in silence. Every gleam had been extinguished, for not a light was to be seen at the windows which were whitened by the rays of the moon. But at one single casement only, a green silk curtain that had long been raised escaped from the hand that held it—and negligently fell again.

X.

The next day, the servant entering the bedchamber of Allan de Cynthry found him still dressed, and stretched senseless on the floor. In falling, the young man's forehead had struck with a shattering shock against the corner of a marble table, and from the wound much blood had flowed.

The servant shrieked, and soon all care was bestowed upon Allan. He lived, opened his eyes, and stared wildly. He spoke, but his words were unintelligible. The doctor declared that he was attacked by brain fever, of shocking intensity.

"And it is, nevertheless, I who have wrought all this evil!" said Madame de Scudemor to herself. "The events of yesternight must have acted too strongly on the nerves of his sensual organisation."

Thus did a reproach spring from the bottom of her soul. Thus from pity she fell back into pity.

She declared she would nurse Allan herself. She took her place near his bed, and never left him. She dressed his wound, gave him all the

doctor wished him to take, and as the patient—a prey to agitation and delirium—often thrust from him all that was offered, she passed each day, with outstretched neck and staring gaze, looking at that head and brain overturned by her, and in which the extinction of thought seemed but the forerunner of the end of existence.

If Madame de Scudemor had not been turned into bronze by the grief of bygone days, perhaps she might have been recaptured by one of those sentiments which had made her so unhappy, and for the thousandth time thought and experience would have been wrecked against the incorrigible sensitiveness of woman. But when of the ship she has destroyed not a plank remains floating on the waves of passion; when imagination has been stifled in the blood lost by the heart, she can look without weakening, and see the being who has adored her die. Without danger, she can remain at the bedside where each breath of the creature at death's door shortens life, in the warm room as if in a hothouse of human respiration, and where the silence is hardly broken by a careful footstep on the carpet, a sigh of the sufferer, or of her who watches, deeply moved. She is no longer a victim to the fascination of suffering, which is more al-

luring even than that of beauty. She does not give way any more to those tears, through which she sees herself superb—more desirable than when she mirrored herself in the sobbing eyes of those who thirsted for her in days gone by. She was not under the influence of that madness, arising, one might say, like the contagion of delirium from the feverish breath of the patient. She dreams not of happiness as the time flies rapidly by, the happiness of visions and sensuality, while a fellow-creature is agonising and dies. She says not to herself that dying kisses are better than living ones, and that there is a funereal and despairing delight, better than all the voluptuousness of life, to be tasted on the turf of that grave already dug for him who is soon to be lowered therein.

At the side of Allan's bed, Madame de Scudemor was, as everywhere else, inaccessible to all that would have disturbed another woman whose grief would have less strengthened her reason. Nevertheless, she had lost that abstraction of all things and of all feeling, which gave her, in the eyes of all who approached her, a tranquil egotism, the appearance of someone in whom trouble and reflection had smoothed away all asperities. Pity, which is per-

haps only the comprehension and the remembrance of our own griefs, had established a bond between her and Allan.

This woman, who seemed to have become impersonal, was learning that after the anguish of the errors of the passions, there were other possible griefs, and that there are always enough illusions left in life for us to be able to see, one day or another, that they are never really all dead! It was thus that she had long believed that her destiny had placed a finger on her lips; that, out of sheer exhaustion, she would escape from the emotions which suddenly interrupted the calm current of her thoughts—meditation of great and powerful souls, the only harbour of refuge against the tempests of the heart. But this presumption, which was only the appeasement of a life that was finishing; this presumption, modest offspring of pain, and which had no proud brow to be cast down by force, soon bent easily beneath eternal Pity, the dove tinted with the colour of the heavens from which it descends, but which has also a beak of steel and eagle's claws; for it builds not its nest in a heart except by rending it in twain!

Alas! she, less than anybody, was unable to escape from the thraldom of this fatal pity. She

lived too much in the bypaths of life. The solitude of her soul was so vast, that everything having a tendency to tempt her from her retirement, anything troubling confusingly her solitude, resounded in her soul, clearly and profoundly, as a chord is more distinct when struck in a pure atmosphere. Ah! often when we rush with our eyes shut into the whirl of society; when we let our fragile brain become intoxicated by the noise of the wheels of the chariot which carries us up the steep road of life, a voice, weaker than a murmur, pursues us amidst all the loud noises which have never overpowered it—eternal complaint of some being who suffers for us, and of which we keep the expiatory echo locked in our breast. But how deep is this voice, when we are seated at the side of the travelled road, disgusted at the goals we have missed—or attained!—and when there is so great a calm in the surrounding air that we lose not a whisper of the quivering leaves trembling on the pale branches of the trees bordering our path!

Who has not heard it? Who does not know that there is a tender and cruel reproach in the sentiment of pity for those who are guilty, and for those who are innocent—if there are any; if it is possible not to always believe oneself guilty, when

a soul—a single soul—has suffered through our fault?

But such remorse, which is at the bottom of all pity, was more accentuated in Madame de Scudemor's heart, because it was mingled with anxiety, making its burning stabs keenly felt. She was uneasy at the thought of the danger Allan was in, and no one had ever seen as then that mixture of interest and fright in her marble eyes, as she asked the doctor: "Will the boy die?"

The illness of Allan had attained such a degree of intensity that there remained little hope of saving him. When it was seen at the Willows that Madame de Scudemor never left the dying youth's bedside, these worldly butterflies, who had no desire to sadden their rosy gaiety by funereal scenes, flew away one after the other. So this Château, at one moment crowded with people, now sheltered but three persons: Allan, Madame de Scudemor, and Camilla.

Sometimes the little girl came and asked after the patient at the bedroom door; for Madame de Scudemor had forbidden her to enter. The far-seeing mother did not desire that Allan's delirium should let her daughter find out anything of what should ever remain hidden from her. But this

precaution was needless. Allan's thoughts had no bearing upon any of the events that had caused his illness. In none of his senseless words was there a vibration of the feeling that filled his heart. Such is the profound pettiness of human nature. We have sentiments by which we live and breathe and we still live and breathe while these sentiments seem to exist no longer! And it is not some intimate fact, a fatal consequence of this feeling, which destroys it, but an exterior and brutal fact, foreign to its nature. The heart is like our reason behind a veil. The heart is gone when we lose our reason. What a situation for a loving woman—and who seeks in the depths of the wild look some vague gleam which shall not be the ironical mirage of annihilated reason—when she finds something more than the shadows of despair and insanity in the blind man's smile, and in the eyes more frightful than empty sockets, since it is not the living orbs of sight that are wanting, but the thoughts themselves! It is true that Madame de Scudemor did not feel the anguish of such an awful search for a feeling engulfed in the abyss of madness, nor of the identity of the heart, by reason of the defeat of reason in a weakened organisation. More majestic than sneering Democritus in his scorn,

she contemplated without a shudder the limits of the spot where lives and dies all that man possesses of most divine essence, intermixed with the atoms of his clay. It was a sight worthy of her. After the heavy ordeals she had gone through, she dressed, with proud relief, all the wounds of her feet, bruised in the dust of humanity. But such moments were brief. By inconceivable inconsistency, her sadness, her pity, her remorse, seized upon her again little by little; and why remorse, pity, or sadness, when one knows how everything can or should die, in the soul as well as in life?

XI

A storm was brewing that afternoon at three o'clock. Rays of tropical heat fell from the heavy clouds, and the swallows flew low, touching the earth with frightened wings. In vain to give air in the room had Allan's window been opened. From the casement, whence the eye could take in the marsh that fronted the Château of the Willows, the storm could be seen gathering in the tempest-laden sky. The devouring sun of the day had disappeared behind vast, cloudy, dark blue masses, only giving out dull yellow rays which darted in sinister fashion through space from behind their rugged edges. The heat was stifling, worse than noonday sunlight. Even the fen itself, with its grass and water, had lost all its coolness; the vegetation was burning, and the thousand ponds and pools incrusted in the turf seemed as if boiling. In the distance, a red, fiery vapour was hovering, seemingly like the reflection of a conflagration; and—since there was not a single hedge in this vast space—immovable as if fixed to the ground,

the numerous white and brindled cows of the marshes, with their round eyes languidly gazing at the empty horizon, had not even strength enough to blow a soft and sighing breath from their open nostrils.

Allan, his head bound up, the cheeks scarlet, the misty eyes half-closed, was plunged in the deep somnolence of the fever which always seized upon his frame as evening drew nigh. Scarce twenty-four hours had passed since the doctor had answered for his patient's life. Thanks to the watchfulness of Madame de Scudemor, still more than to medical care, he was saved. Silence reigned around him. All was quiet then, in the dumb country landscape as in the slumbering chamber. Not a sound came from outside, and indoors the rustle of Allan's white curtains could only be heard at each breath of the burning breeze that passed through the open window.

Yseult de Scudemor was at her post of solicitude and devotion. Anxiety and late hours had already made her thin. The sadness that had crept over her at Allan's danger still plunged her broad, pale forehead in darkness. Why is calmness not always placid? Why does the sea after a tempest, when

the day is resplendent, still have the same aspect as at night? It is because, the storm spent, the sky has clouds nearly every day; it is because Thought, even as Sadness, possesses great black wings which cannot be seen, and which throw on our brow when it has been cleared as much shadow as if the pinions were visible.

Madame de Scudemor was seated at the head of the bed, but the curtain which was pulled forward would have prevented the patient from seeing her. Her arms were crossed on her beautiful and inflexible bust. It could not be said that she was dreaming. The thoughtful face of Madame de Scudemor never grew dull in the blunted sensibility of a reverie. Through the transparency of the white curtain floating between Allan and her, she could see him, to whom was returning the consciousness of exterior objects. Poor blind man, only catching sight of the light of day through the veiled impression that the fallen bandage still leaves to the as yet unsteady eyes! What he felt, we have all experienced, but it is inexpressible. He tried to accustom himself to life once more, to the movement of the tide which had lifted him out of the depths of the whirlpool, and softly carried him back once more. He blindly sought his lost iden-

tity. He said not a word to the woman who doubtless had never left him. He did not dare speak to her first, and he was burning with impatience for her to speak to him. Twenty times the words: "Thank you for so much care!" came uppermost to his lips, but only to die away in a sigh, divided as he was between resentment and gratitude. She, still believing *her* patient to be under the somnolent influence of the fever, had not remarked his open eyes on the look-out behind the curtain, nor his impatience to break the silence that weighed upon him.

He made a movement to sit up, but he was so weak that he fell back again. She heard him. So she opened the curtain, and, by the expression of his eyes, she saw that the prostration had ceased.

"How are you?" she said, with the hushed accents of words spoken with half-closed lips.

And he who had but one thought:

"Oh, do not ask me!" he said. "If I were better, should I not have to leave you?"

And an egotistical and cowardly tear came wetting the corners of his reddened eyelids.

She did not answer, but dropped her eyes as Curtius must have done before leaping into the

gulf. She lifted them, glowing with infrangible will.

"Allan," she rejoined, "I think you can listen to me now, without danger to yourself; for emotion only harms when it rends, and I will not rend you. I release you from your pledge of departure."

She was obliged to repeat her last words. Allan thought himself the dupe of an illusion engendered by sleep or the fever.

"No, Allan, it is not an illusion," she added; "it is I who am speaking to you here now. See! this hand that I place on yours is really mine. Do you recognise it by its coldness? Alas! you could not warm it in yours, but it shall remain there until you push it away."

He ardently glued it to his lips; but as if the burning contact had not been perceptible for her, she continued:

"Your bedside has been a formidable education for me, and a few days passed doubting about a life I had compromised has ruined my resolutions. When one has once felt pity, one can never draw back! It is like dying when once one has tasted life's sweets. In vain do we interrogate our wise experience which has cost us more than it is worth,

and which we have paid for with the bloody sweat of our heart. Alas! however high pride has proclaimed this wisdom, we still remain women. The narrowness of our personality may be broken through, but it is not widened. I wished to believe so at first, Allan. I esteemed myself as having escaped from every tie by the death of those imbecile passions that accept them. But a week has sufficed to sweep away these deceiving opinions. One week was enough to enlighten me on the pity that I despised. Humiliated pride, and our will betrayed, one feels an invisible hand which bends down all in our inmost soul, and the feeling which we thought we could most dispose of as a generous gift, despite its furtive occupation of our heart, disposes of all our feelings, and bestows us at will.

"Allan! Allan! passions cannot be treated like illnesses, and moralists who advise instead of scrutinising are short-sighted or impostors. When the Will, more intimate than Passion even, takes it not by the throat to strangle it; when it lowers itself to be no more than the puppy in the lion's cage, one must despair of the entire human being, who alone can extricate herself from such peril. In vain the most noble and the most devoted part

of us may become imbued with immense sympathy for the being who gives up his whole life to a fatal passion, and may overwhelm him with the counsels of divine wisdom; passion and reason are not kneaded with the same clay: one is human loam, and the other is the substance of God Himself, while there is no mediator between the two—not even Pity!

"Nevertheless, when Pity exists, all the stronger and all the more ardent in proportion as the sufferings of the being we wish to cure have arisen through our fault, what remains to be done, Allan? For many days, my friend, have I discussed that question at the side of your bed of pain, and you know now how I have solved the problem. I said to myself that I must be devoted to the end; that since woman cannot escape from the organisation of her characteristic nature (and surely suffering and the extinction of sensuality would have given me this sad superiority had it been possible), I ought to divest myself of the selfishness of my thoughts and of the sterility of advice, and put in force greater abnegation than that which had hitherto been useless to me.

"My friend, when I told you the story of my heart—you, untainted by the drawing-room doc-

sign of exhausted nature, the last drop of blood lost in the combat! Before Allan had replied, her cheek had regained its amber pallor. This woman, whose entire grandeur he was too young to understand, had brought chaos into his heart and brain. His love, which just now was consuming itself in the fiery desire for possession, drew back as if in fright in the presence of this so sad and so depreciated gift that Madame de Scudemor made him of herself, in front of this generosity of charity from such a high standpoint! This was more real, more true, more chilling than all the rest. It is confidence in God that generally produces resignation to the cruel events of life; but this resignation to unshared voluptuous passion arose, in the case of Madame de Scudemor, from her confidence in the instability of the heart. Amidst the most furious of his desires, this abandoned language would have suddenly stopped Allan de Cynthry. The happiness he dreamt of, and which she had destroyed in her extraordinary discourse, before throwing it at him as a crust of bread is thrown to a beggar, he did not feel courageous enough to pick up. He no longer recognised himself!

While she spoke, he had let go her fingers, which

at first he had raised to his lips. Now her hand slipped down to the edge of the bed, all alone.

"Ah, why," he murmured, in a reproachful tone, "why were you not content only to tell me that I need not depart?"

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power of the tempest! It is then that a kiss on our sister's brow ceases to be as fresh as the dew of children's lips; it is then that the mouth of our mother as it passes over our own has no longer the taste of former days; we think of this far into the night before falling asleep, feeling ourselves blush in the darkness as if we were guilty, because we draw in the breath of life which announces itself by threatening trouble. Allan was outliving that age, as one always does, but he was assisted by a passion which was no longer the happiness of loving in secret; by his love no longer the love of love. Convalescence soon bent him beneath the yoke of feelings all the more fiery because his senses had never touched upon certain lascivious delights of which habit so quickly destroys the charming intoxication. The more his youthful strength returned to him daily, the more he forgot all he knew of this woman. It was not only convalescence that made his feet weary, it was not only the remains of the fever that moistened his warm palms. There was darkness and concentrated life in those eyes of his, full of the desire of uneasy voluptuousness. It was a singular thing that during the rare moments when he gazed at Madame de Scudemor he conjured up the for-

mer sensually passionate life of the woman who loved him not, and the picture of lubricity he sketched in his brain gave fresh fury to his longings. There is nothing so delirious as this retrospective jealousy containing cantharides in its poisonous admixture.

One evening they were all alone in the *salon* where Madame de Scudemor, amid the crowd of guests, had given Allan that appointment of which the sequel had been so unexpected for both. What a change the three weeks just past had brought about, even in that vast room, full and noisy then, but now dumb, and which appeared all the more spacious with only Allan and Madame de Scudemor in one of its corners! Madame de Scudemor, at this moment, was seated on a divan, always upright and statue-like, always majestic. She wore a simple dress of black satin, cut very low at the breast and without lace. Her bust, large and perfect in shape, was enhanced to the view, emerging from the brilliant blackness of the satin. Nevertheless, her bosom, which seemed as if escaping from the bodice which ought to have made it look whiter still, took more human tints than the dull and dazzling hue of alabaster, because her skin had a golden hue, like that of some beautiful marble

too long exposed to rain. In the shadow thrown by the half-open window-shutters, her powerful head, of which her brown hair, twisted up *à la* Niobe, formed the only ornament, stood out energetically on the background of the white carved woodwork of the wainscoting behind her. Allan was seated on the divan at her side, a black bandage on his brow, forming a dark crown to his chestnut locks, giving his physiognomy a wrinkled, frail, and at the same time stubborn air, of which the charm was irresistible. And yet she could resist him! Madame de Scudemor could see no more beauty in anything now! For any other woman but her, disgusted with everything, a spectre before death, wandering through life no one knew why, the youth, with his enchanting face, would have been a being of infinite seduction. It was the hour so perfidious and so beautiful that God has made for supreme happiness or misfortune. With the point of its dying rays the sun kissed the carnation-coloured velvet window-curtains, and the horizon appeared through the chinks of the shutters, inundated with that pink vapour which seems at this soft and meditative moment to be a reflection in the sky of all the veiled pudicity and secret voluptuousness of the heart. Flowers

were dying in tall vases at the end of the drawing-room. The piano was open, and they were chatting together. And although it was in a half-whisper, often some vibration beneath the sonorous ceiling of this vast empty room betrayed what they said in low tones.

What were they both telling each other? For the first time in his life, Allan, inspired by the mystery of the hour and the shadow of the shutters, by the exhalations from the dying blossoms and the long restrained impatience of his love, gave way to the fascination of his juvenile and burning thoughts.

"Oh! truly," said he poetically, "can it be that a little of what agitates me does not penetrate you, to move you by a feeling that shall not be only that fatal pity? Ah! I only ask that it shall last the instant necessary for a glance and a sigh. Is that too much? O God! Can it be that she who once possessed your soul has no longer a second more of love to give? Let it be but a remembrance or a mistake! it may be anything sooner than this trifle of pity; but at least I shall live a lifetime during that moment! Oh! love me feebly, scarcely at all, but do love me at last, or at least make me believe you love me—me, a poor fool—during the

time nearly passed away now that the sun will take to leave that curtain of which the reflection is already fading from your forehead! Oh, you to whom all is possible, tell me! is this too much?"

"Allan," she replied, "sooner ask the extinct volcano to give you a bouquet of roses! Nothing blooms, even for a second, in my devastated heart."

"Well, then, lie!" rejoined he of the troubled soul. "Lie! for pity's sake! since pity has survived the death of your heart. Tell me only once that this cinder is a rose, that a single pressure of your hand of steel is love, and I will believe you! May eternity undeceive me afterwards, but I shall have believed you!"

"Allan," she answered, "love is more difficult to imitate than youth, which when gone never returns. Besides, when one has deep feelings, the language of true passion scarcely appeases the misgivings of love. If truth cannot satisfy the infatuated soul, do you think that you could sate yourself with the clumsy illusions of a lie that would lower us both?"

"Truly!" he exclaimed, bowing his head beneath the cross of this demonstration. And once more he began to climb up this Golgotha of the

Impossible, which all men mount, to go and die at the summit.

A little more shadow came into the already darkened room.

"See!" he continued, "where there was light, there is now no more." And pointing with his finger, he sadly showed her the red curtain. "Had you willed it, it might have been finished by this time!"

"Neither, at my wish, nor at your commands, Allan," said Madame de Scudemor, "will more light return there than here!"

And she placed her hand on her heart. During this, the wind brought the scent of the flowers of night from the garden, and the pink sky changed colour through the chinks of the blinds.

"Well, then," he cried out violently, "let darkness serve me!"

At last passion rose in him. With both hands he seized upon her bodice, throwing himself upon her bust, like Achilles on the sword, and the child became a man.

An imperceptible movement of recoil had escaped Madame de Scudemor, but the heroic woman approached near Allan, as if she wished to chastise revolting instinct in herself. Allan started, throw-

time nearly passed away now that the sun will take to leave that curtain of which the reflection is already fading from your forehead! Oh, you to whom all is possible, tell me! is this too much?"

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ing his body back to the end of the divan, as if that instant flames had burst out beneath his feet.

"Oh! pardon! pardon!" said he, wringing his hands with anguish. "Pardon me! but I could resist no longer! But I suffer! I feel as if going mad! You should have let me die! Oh! for pity's sake, tell me, order me to go from your presence! Perhaps I might still obey you. It is time I went out of this room. Its atmosphere crushes me. These flowers intoxicate me. For pity's sake drive me out of this room!"

"That would be cowardice," she answered, proudly inflating her nostrils, as if she had stepped on a snake. And she added nothing more.

"But are you then not a human being?" he cried. And he dug his two closed fists into his eyes, as one does when playing the atheist in the face of the world. "Are you not of the same nature as me?" he cried.

And as if searching the solution of the problem for which his intelligence no longer sufficed, he placed his thrilling hands once again on her body, at the waist. The satin creaked under his fingers, and was iridescent as if electrified. He felt the resistance of the voluptuous curve of her hips against his thigh, tingling with a thousand stings.

He became pale, then purple, then pale again, and the happiness he sought to breathe brought over his boyish face sublime beauty, such as is seen but once in life, and which one never looks upon again.

Madame de Scudemor gazed upon him with her deep glance, which seemed to probe his soul. But he so loved her that he seemed to take a proud pleasure in defying her piercing eyes. She could still mirror herself in the lowest pit of Allan's heart. A vague smile came upon her lips, while above them the breath of Allan skimmed over the velvety dark tracing which has no name in the catalogue of woman's charms, but which doubles the fury of kisses. It was there that the first moist caress fell from the young man's virginal mouth. Ah! this first kiss pressed upon a woman's lips, who has not almost died from it?

The others, the thousand others that follow, were showered like cutting rain upon the shoulders, and the swelling cold globes of the regal bust. He only interrupted his devouring caresses to look upon her with eyes softer than in a dream. Why do all caresses begin and finish with a look?

"Oh! I love thee! I love thee!" he repeated, with a voice that had no more sonority. "Love me not, but let me love thee!"

And enlacing her in a double grip, he threw her back on the divan. She fell, resigned, more nobly than the Roman woman who at the supreme hour draped her tunic, to die the more chastely. Seeing that woman devoid of resistance, who would have believed that it was ineffable devotion for her to so give herself up to him, and that not a loving throb would follow? Not once did amorous Allan produce upon her flesh the tepid warmth of the contagion of the pleasure in which he was then able to revel. In the midst of this love, in which any other woman would have been drowned and lost, and which brought not a single refreshing drop to her fatigued brow, Madame de Scudemor resembled a diver in his bell beneath the ocean. The sensation of the first and incomparable transports of possession is indivisible, and the man is absorbed in a formidable unity. Were it not for that, who would empty the chalice, if the half-drunk liquor was icy cold and destitute of aroma?

. . . . .

"Oh, you are mine now!" he said, after a long silence, as if he had recovered from a swoon. "Entirely mine!"

And he lifted her up. Madame de Scudemor's head was lost in the silk of the cushions of the

divan. The comb that held and fixed the coil of her hair fell, and her tresses flowed over her shoulders. Hazard has sometimes these strange falsehoods to hoodwink us; lying as if blind chance understood what it was doing. This appearance of passion and disorder contrasted with the untroubled physiognomy of the woman with the dishevelled hair, her features like a lake of deep limpidity in which the sky was not reflected. In a later moment this face was an answer of bronze to the triumphant Allan. Was there a being in this world who more than Madame de Scudemor would have escaped from the sensuality of which she possessed the science, and who, at this very moment, would have more intimately retired into the desert of her wretched personality?

Her hands refastened the black silk bandage that encircled Allan's brow.

"I feared just now," she said, "that your wound might have opened itself again."

That remark summed her up entirely, but the lightning, which had blasted her great soul, had not been able to destroy in her the last and the most weak of all womanly sympathies.

Night was closing in. The breeze, as it blew in

through the window, was freshening. The flowers in the vases seemed to be more dead than ever. On the divan nothing could be made out, so much obscurity stretching along the white ceiling. Without thinking about it, their voices had fallen progressively with the failing day. Irresistible effect of the solemnity of night, which makes us speak low as in a church!

A light footstep was heard coming up the steps of the terrace on which gave the French windows of the *salon,* where the shutters had only been pushed to. It was Camilla, who returned that way from the garden.

"Where are you, mamma?" she said, before entering, with her rosy voice unequalled in tenderness, like that which God ought to bestow upon a blind man's guide, to console him for never more being able to see.

Madame de Scudemor had risen from the divan and leant upon the window, of which she had opened the shutter.

"Have you not been able to walk out this evening—Allan and you?" said Camilla, whose shoes, white with dust, contrasted with the black shadows of the floor.

She sat on the music-stool at the piano, which

had not been closed since her exercises in the morning.

"You say so much, mamma, that you love Normandy for its sunsets! You never saw how beautiful was the one of this evening!"

Madame de Scudemor gave an insignificant pretext to her daughter for not having been out that evening. Remaining on the divan, Allan meditated inwardly on the impression created by the last few hours. His soul was sad. Why, since he had been happy even to inebriation? Ah! he had been happy indeed. "Sad as the joys that are passed," Ossian has said, with his deep old man's glance into the heart of mankind.

As Allan was silent:

"Are you any worse this evening?" said Camilla, with unaccustomed timidity; for since the young man had changed in manner with her, the bold child seemed to be frightened of him.

If she addressed a question to him, she trembled like a leaf while awaiting his reply.

"What makes you think I am worse?" he replied roughly. "Is it because I have not been playing with you?"

His accents were all the more harsh because he was vexed that the little girl should have come

and interrupted his joys, placing herself as an obstacle between him and the woman whom he would have wished to hold a little longer in his arms. There was silence again. But a short and resounding groan was heard.

It was only the piano, on the keys of which Camilla had leant her elbows, so as thus to rest her head in her hands.

XIII.

ALLAN TO MADAME DE SCUDEMOR.

"Oh, Yseult! Yseult! the evening of yesterday has made me forget the sufferings that preceded it, and has undeceived us both. You love me, since you did not repulse my caresses! That is what I keep on repeating to myself! That has sanctioned my happiness. You were all mine, Yseult, but you would not let me take you without love! It was love that you mistook for pity! When one has suffered in former days, fear masks the feeling from which one might again suffer. You shut your eyes to it, but your love is there, in spite of yourself!

"Yes! you love me, since you gave yourself to me! Adorable woman! no one has been able to tear from you the power to love. It has been tortured, lacerated, but has remained in you, inexhaustible, and you thought the source was dried up. They have unworthily abused all the most

celestial part of the gifts that God has squandered upon you, but they could not despoil you of the magnificence of your soul. In vain these insensate and cruel prodigals imagined they had torn from you all the treasure of tenderness and devotion of which each womanly heart is full; in vain, with your pride wounded by your sufferings, you thought you had only to give to him who loved you the widow's mite remaining from so many buried affections; that pity so often invoked by you! You did not know any more than they did, Yseult, what a colossal fortune remained to you. I, who have come the last of them all, I will fashion myself a cup in which to drink happiness and love out of the fragments of the alabaster vase they have broken, and in which such a sweet perfume remains impregnated, that it seemed composed of all the flowers in the springtide of your youth!

"I have suffered much, and it was your fault! And yet you are not one of those women who hide their secret thoughts or give them the lie. Your noble heart had refused to retain what society might have perhaps taught you if you had not been yourself. You always appeared to me too great a woman not to be truthful. All your words breathe

the sincerity of a friend, but, despite yourself, you were something more for me, and the same day was to come and sweep away the illusions with which you crushed me and my misgivings, more obstinate than my hopes! That day did come at last, and something more than your lips has spoken, Yseult! Ah! I am very weak, or the unexpected happiness is very terrible, but this has been for me such an invasion of felicity in my soul, that even if you had not been sincere before this day of pardon, after it you would have been pardoned!

"And you, Yseult, are you not also happy to find that youth again which you thought had faded? For a soul like yours to get old is a word without meaning. Thus, do you not rejoice in the midst of your despair of a few days ago, to recognise that you are immortal? What noble joy! And pride too, well worthy of you! When you said that you were only the spectre of your former self, when you swore that the lid of the sepulchre was sealed over your frozen heart, did you not feel something like inconsolable regret of life, some secret horror of your nothingness? Did you not weep over the extinguished torch, in this night of the Catacombs in which you wandered aimlessly

alone? You, a strong and living creature who formerly had always risen up again, more indomitable at each reverse of fortune! You, whom suffering had never prevented from offering your brave heart, in the intrepidity of its love, to deception, treachery, and ingratitude! Did you not feel that your part of heroine was too soon played out, that to always love, and to love again, was a great and beautiful destiny—a destiny that suited you above all others? Did you not feel that a woman whose love has not been dried up by these bitter winds of life was greater even than God? For God, as He is, saves the eternity of His love from suffering, and woman has not been preserved from it.

"Let them rave on, those troubled beings, because they are narrow-minded; let them rave, I say, in all the agitation of their petty jealousy! As for me, I understand what is infinite better than they, and you can be reassured, Yseult. No! the virgin is not worth the woman who has been purified in the crucible of the passions. She does not equal her either in love or even in modesty. It is above all when she loves for the hundredth time that woman is most sublime. That is what your love has taught me, that is what has made me adore

you on my knees, and more prostrate still! Is it not written, O my beloved, that the ninth heaven is the most beautiful?

"Therefore have no fear for me, Yseult! In the supreme felicity of being loved by you, I shall forget all you have told me of your life; or if sometimes you remind me of it, you will only be greater in my sight for that very reason. Do I not owe you the happiness missed in every ordeal? Place upon my head, then, Yseult, your last essay of happiness! Ah! that idea makes more than a man of me. It makes me divine, in order to love you better!

"Yes! you shall be loved by me, Yseult, as you desired to be loved in the most exacting day of your youth, and you shall find once more in my love the felicities begun and destroyed, as well as the other loves, past and evaporated. I feel the pride of an immense love. I think I am victorious over all the sterile hearts that have loved you. Did you not say to me that I was truer and more pure? Do not fight against the feelings that sway you! Confess that they conquer you utterly! Oh, in spite of the ecstasy I found in your arms, Yseult, my happiness is still incomplete. I want to hear you confide in me and in yourself. Let me hear you

say: 'It is true, Allan, paltry pity could not have driven me to such a sacrifice!' and I shall never ask you anything more, and I will lean on your shoulder until you lean on mine, at rest for centuries and indestructibly happy!"

XIV.

MADAME DE SCUDEMOR TO ALLAN.

"Allan, the most wretched instrument becomes a harp for a poet, and your letter is a song of love. Your youth will not believe what I told you about myself; it has been sweeter for you to think that I did not know myself. Because I acted like those who love, you hurry to proclaim my heart's resurrection. Alas! why should you not? Oh! the common and miserable thing that we should be so often dupe as much of our joys as of our failures!

"Ah! if I had only been discouraged, perhaps you would have been right, my poor Allan. Discouragement is still passion. It is prostrate, but yet alive. It is cruel despondency, I know, but at the bottom there is rebellion. As long as one murmurs, one is not entirely cut off. I have known this state of the soul, this languor of fatiguing despair, this cowering over oneself, this wrapping of the head in the mantle, when resolved to let oneself die, like Anaxagoras of old. Have I not read that

Pericles came too late? You also, like Pericles, have missed the hour, Allan. It has passed long ago, and if I told you that love was impossible for me, I did not complain, but I judged myself.

"You, my friend, have placed me too high in your exalted adoration. I know not if there are women whose souls have weakened in love—who, at the bite of each love fallen from their breasts, could always take up another to replace it. I know not if their exceptional nature has made grief powerless, so that they could fearlessly and generously open their bosoms to it. Alas! there was only room for seven swords in the heart of the mother of Him who was all love. But if there exist women always defeated, yet never vanquished, who have not lost strength at the thousandth embrace, capable of the happiness of being loved, which is more difficult still than to love, if such have existed or do exist, you may write them down as sublime, for so they surely are, and I am not like them. Passion has devoured me entirely. I resisted the current of my fate, which swept me to where I fell. I resisted a long time, all in tears, tearing my flesh against the mocking trees of the bank, as they gave way beneath my grasp. But I was forced to submit! The flood of grief and pain rose steadily,

and the abyss was not far off—empty, yawning, solitary, into which you stretch your arms, young man, but from which you cannot drag me up. From over the barren edge you lean to try and reach me, but I only receive your tears. Can you not see that I am not the admirable creature you say I am?—she whose imperturbable love is always a fresh virginity! Oh, poet, take back your starry crown; I am not worthy to wear it!

"Allan, you want love in exchange for yours, therefore you obstinately deny the existence of my pity. You cannot understand that without love I did not repulse you. But that is because you do not know, my friend, what is pity in women's hearts. I ignored it, as you do, before I had seen your struggles and your weaknesses. But, believe me, it is something really eternal and really irresistible, since I, who have dearly paid for the empire I have over myself, could not defend myself against that sentiment which is too much misunderstood. Ah! pity is love without its happiness. That is why it is not love.

"If you had loved anyone but me, Allan, some other having a little of the youth of the heart left to her, perhaps what comprises three-quarters of woman's love would have sufficed for your ardour.

This pity would have revived expiring tenderness, reopened the source of half-dried tears and caused a last enchantment to bloom in the midst of all this melancholy. *She* would have cried over you, and over herself. She would have told you to support her. She would have entwined her arms about you as about the last pillar of her temple, and you would have lost yourself among all this tenderness which would still have been love, desired felicity, a ray of a tardy sun, but all the sweeter in this withered foliage of the autumn, wet with the tears of an afflicted sky. Why am I not one of the elect who loosen themselves slowly from life, and yet hold to it, regretting to go? Why did your arms, entwining my neck, not get for me a necklace of a few last illusions? Why did my heart, like an ice-cold old man, not grow warm under such a sun? Why at those moments, when you searched in my soul through my eyes—both laid waste!—for some emotion to console you, for some ephemeral but returning intoxication, telling you that you might have more courage to hope on, have I not even shown the exaltation or the tenderness of my pity? Ah! that is because nothing of what God forgets often to take away from unhappy women was left to me—the solace of some enthusi-

asm from time to time, and enough sensibility to be able to drop a tear. No! you cannot mistake, Allan. I have none of those enlacing embraces where the mother and mistress are blended. I could not bend over a beloved face to pour out that deluge of celestial tears which, on the cherished brow as in the hearts of those who shed them, should not dry too quickly. I am but a woman without magic skill, a spirit without a halo, and if what I have done, Allan, is devotion, I have not even the inward joy of its accomplishment.

"Besides, it was but a poor sacrifice, and one which should not have troubled you to this extent. As long as it is not one's own soul and happiness that is sacrificed, even if we drink blood, like that daughter who saved her father, devotion is so imperfect that it does away with gratitude. What was I at your side, Allan? I was old, and so cured of life that I had retracted all the curses I had called down upon it in former days, whilst you, young man, had not yet suffered what involuntarily I have made you endure. The future stretched out its arms as to a friend; and later, existence would have been beautiful and sweet for you. Ought I not to have spared you its anguish as well as I could? Ought I to have gone and sought out some

silly motive among the ideas of society to oppose that fatal pity? Would it have been generous for me, sullied by more than one love, to have listened to some scruple or the other, when, for the first time, I was not in question? My conduct has been more simple, Allan, but do not seek to ennoble me by the holocaust. Do not bind me to you by one tie more. My hand does not tremble when writing that I gave myself up; but if I could have given you a throb of the heart or a tear, I should have then done much more for you."

XV.

During Allan's illness, Camilla, who, as we have seen, was only allowed by her mother to come and get news of the patient at the door of his room, had lived in the independence of isolation. Madame de Scudemor, alarmed at the danger Allan was in, had eyes but for him. The care of her daughter was lost in a much more anxious watching of quite another kind. We do not sufficiently reflect upon the fact that the maternal feeling which comes from the bowels, that is to say, lower down than the heart, would lose all the holiness of its character if some remembrance or regret did not save it from the mere instinct of animality. We ought to believe that a mother is never so beautiful as when she is a fragment of a mistress. Past happiness, trouble that has been felt, compensation of mistaken expectation, that is what forms the mysterious glory shining round the head of a cherished child, a pale star eternally bathing in the murmuring water of tears that spring from the heart; such

is the secret of this delightful tenderness, of the looks more passionate than all the passions, and which fall, as sweet blessings on a stupid son or an ugly daughter, like a kiss of God to nature! But when this love, this seamless tunic enveloping two united hearts, has been torn in every thread of its weak web, and there remains not one sacred strip to make a blanket for the crying infant, the wretched little being grows up as it can in its cradle. Has the umbilical cord of the past been cut like that of the flesh? The child no longer holds to its mother. This united existence, in its marvellous double bond, breaks apart quite suddenly, and, what a cruel thing! in this sundering of two lives, it is not distance that can separate them to any greater extent.

Poor Camilla and poor Yseult! There was thus nothing but exterior relationship between them, and a feeling, tender like all that is on the point of disappearance, arising from habit, by the idea of the weakness of the child, which constituted a duty of protection in Madame de Scudemor's mind, but nothing adherent and intimate. Such was the last negation of Fate, that had refused this woman everything except the heart that was needed to make her suffer.

So it will be easily understood that she was obliged to occupy herself exclusively with the fresh relations which his sufferings, of which she felt herself guilty, had established between her and Allan de Cynthry.

Camilla had never enjoyed such liberty. Never as then had she been able to give way to her thousand whims, lose her time with more lazy idleness, the time which is often only gained when it is entirely lost. She passed each day wandering aimlessly round the marshes and the adjacent country on the other side of the Château; and when the sun that tanned her face was too hot, she sat down, leaning against the trunk of a willow, or at the side of a ditch, waiting until the heat diminished to continue her careless stroll. When evening came on, she did not go away. The voice that should be obeyed told her no more to return home because the dew was too cold after such a hot day; there was no one to throw a woollen shawl over her shoulders at a moment when a chill might have been mortally dangerous. She was a stray sheep to whom God tempered the wind, a bird believing neither in Providence nor in the power of its wings, and whom the breeze played with, exciting no resistance; a child too neglected to confide

in anybody, for confidence is but the abdication of will-power. Who is confiding knows that he has confidence, and she knew it not. She played beneath the sky without caring for a threatening cloud, for coming night, or for a chilly atmosphere. She breathed at her ease, released from the restraint of the rich child's education, and as the daughters of the poor dwellers in the fens, she only wanted to go about barefooted, to be like them.

But was it the cause to which she owed her unaccustomed liberty that prevented her from enjoying it freely? Had anxiety, no doubt vague, as always in a child, placed a black speck on her limpid horizon? Had a stray leaf of sinister omen, blown from the tree of Death, fallen upon the surface of the lake that mirrored heaven, and had it caused a ripple, soon to be effaced? Or was this life so new and sweet for her in her liberty and solitude that she did not require to enjoy it hastily, as if it were something fine which melts in the hand in a twinkling, that she did not rush at it like a short play-hour, but which she slowly revelled in, so as to savour its delights, and in which she quietly consumed her energies? Be that as it may, she was no longer to be seen bounding freely

as in former times, with that strength of deep vitality which betrays itself superficially; or grasping at the air with her greedy palms, as with lips parted by desire, she missed the butterfly her fingers had touched—and afterwards sad, looking at her digits covered with the golden powder of the wings that had just escaped her, as if she had the intuition of this melancholy symbol of all things, which we only touch to taint and sully! Although the flowers, those magnets of young girls, which seem to have eyes in their chalices and breath in their perfume, tried all they could to smile at her from afar, on their grassy carpet or at the water's edge, she hastened no more to gather them. She became careless, she went out no more to run, but was still graceful, not with her old lively and encircling activity of the lark, but with that slower and more chaste bearing of the swan, sleeping on a lake without a current. And thus she passed, almost dreamily crawling, so languidly that she seemed as if reflecting profoundly.

When an inhabitant of those parts, going towards the Douve, crossed the marshes and met her there in her solitary wandering, he would bow to her as if she was not a child, gravely saluting her

as "Mademoiselle." Sometimes it was a tall and robust youth going fishing with his nets on his shoulder, or perhaps an old boatman, his brow heavy with the fatigues of the day and the cares of the morrow—and it was a touching thing to see rough men, these laborious conquerors of a difficult life, uncovering their heads respectfully before this girl from the towns, and who seemed of another race. Often Camilla stopped to look with inattentive eyes at small groups of joyous children scattered hither and thither on the marshes, troubling the sun-warmed water of the pools as they plunged their naked legs therein. They were all there, noisy, shouting, with their quicksilver movements and their torn garments, showing their magnificent ruddy Norman complexions, due to their brown bread diet, and their plump cheeks, radiant with the softened scarlet hue of the leaves reddened by autumn. It was strange to see them silent at the approach of Camilla, and how they turned their big heads round, covered with fair and dark curls, while their luminous astonished eyes followed the little girl, who stopped an instant to look at them, and she so pale, so sad, so lonely. Could it be that these children felt obscurely, as their fathers did, when they passed by,

that in the winsome lassie there was misery which was not like theirs, and in whose presence egotistical human nature forgot to be envious, and only remembered to be respectful?

XVI.

It was the middle of September, the most beautiful season of the year in Normandy. The rich green grass was gone, but the oak trees blushed beneath a blushing sky. The hawthorns no longer bloomed in the pathways where the wind detaches and scatters them from the hedge, which they make all white with thick and odorous dust, filling up the ruts left by the carts in the days of winter, but the brambles disappeared beneath the weight of the blackberries that weighed them down. The clear gold of the wild cabbage was no longer seen waving in the distance on the plain, contrasting with the purple-violet tint of the flowering clover, like shorn velvet; but everywhere the hue of ploughed land. The straight or leaning apple trees of the orchard have lost their pink and white draperies, but the vermilion masses of fruit, which for us folk of the West are our oranges and grapes, gleamed brilliantly through the branches, and fell at the foot of their trunks as if tossed out from a horn of abundance. The buckwheat, the

black bread of the poor, which blooms so white, had not yet been cut; but the work will be done in a few days, and with their sheaves, bound up and piled on the ground at equal distances, they will form a camp of small carmine tents. When evening comes on (the orange-hued Norman evenings), clouds, superb in form and colour, form above this land of such exuberant aspect, and in the presence of their magic display the calm purity of the most beautiful sky of springtime is not regretted. The joyous chant of the harvest girls and mowers, returning to the farms to supper, is no longer heard, only the melancholy barking of a dog, teased by an echo, following the footsteps of some belated sportsman. Such an autumn makes up for the snows that are to follow; and viewing it, an Italian might perhaps understand, no doubt, that one could see Naples and not die.

The hour of noon was striking, gay as the hour of all repasts, in the spire of Sainte-Mère-Eglise, and at these soft and confused sounds in the midst of a moist, luminous atmosphere, the old women, who were at work at the arched doors of their thatched houses, scattered along the road that goes from Sainte-Mère-Eglise to Monteburg, made their sign of the cross and recited their *Angelus*. The

sun was still powerful enough to cause one to seek cool shade.

It was probably on account of this warmth of the atmosphere, dilated by the sun, then at its height, that two persons on horseback, a man and a woman, took a shady bypath winding between two naked hedges, and which led to a hillock, whence the country landscape could be perceived smiling, showing its masses of trees and pasture-land. These two persons seemed to have ridden for some distance, for their horses were bathed in sweat: they were only walking, under the loose floating reins that their masters had let drop, as far as the hillock, where they stopped. The young man dismounted to offer his hand to his companion, but, as agile as he, with one bound she was on her feet, without making use of the aid he so eagerly proffered.

"Let us stop here, and wait until the heat has abated before returning to the Willows," she said, while her companion tied the horses to a branch of the hedge, and she threw up her veil that covered her face beneath her man's hat.

"Are you tired, dearest?" asked the young man, with trembling fear and respectful adoration.

"I ought to have put that question to you, Al-

lan," she answered, with a smile. "You are still convalescent, and we have been, perhaps, too far for you this morning."

"Oh! fear naught," he rejoined, "my Yseult. Life is firmly anchored in my breast, and will not leave me yet."

She looked upon him with her quiet eyes, as if gazing at a madman. To tell the truth, his face was very pale, and his frame too thin and bent, to speak thus of life. He seemed like a graceful spectre.

"Let us sit down, Yseult," he said.

And they sat on the side of the hillock, the sun behind them, but protected from its rays by the rising ground.

"How beautiful you are!" he whispered to her, in intoxicated tones.

It was almost true. The autumn appeared nearly as splendid, although more advanced, as did that woman in the face of Nature.

Never had the decided outlines of those charms, which seemed to have been moulded for the eternal battles of voluptuous passion, been revealed in a more exciting manner than beneath the black cloth riding-habit. The ride and the heat had slightly swollen the veins of her face, and set a flame burn-

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ing at the top of her pale cheeks, which had not been seen there for many a day. The lips were half-open, and the air reached the moist teeth—those teeth that this woman, a lioness of love, had received to take the place of her lips, impotent for kisses. The animation of her features was so great that one forgot the wrinkles that began to cross them, and which ought to have furrowed more in this cruel noonday light, the crude gleam of the blue sky.

She took off her chamois glove, and began to smooth her dark tresses on her temples, showing that a few hairs had been prematurely silvered by the troubles of life.

"Oh, Allan!" she rejoined, after a pause, while the amorous young man encircled the arched waist with his arm, "I am as beautiful as you are happy! To-morrow is there, threatening both of us. At the bottom of that beauty you love, as in the depths of the happiness now present for you, there is a germ of death which may suddenly be developed in a day."

That very instant, as if to prove her right, the brightness of the ride and the heat which had lit her up faded away. No doubt she felt herself getting pale again, and that the withered woman ap-

peared once more; for she began to smile sadly, with a smile which the tempting, appetising moisture of the lips, already dried up, no longer bathed, and which showed her teeth still beautiful, but between them was the imperceptible black speck which hides among the flowers and causes them to die.

"How cruel you are, Yseult!" said Allan bitterly. "Are all you women thus? Do you always poison the fruit that you give to the wretch who is dying of thirst, and who blesses you? While I am sufficiently intoxicated with you to forget that you do not love me, you dry all up with funereal accents! You overwhelm me with your reasoning!"

"Allan," she answered, "by repeating often to man that he is naught but dust, his heart has ofttimes been turned towards Heaven! If a dying ray of my past beauty had not shone upon my brow, you would never have loved me, you, a child and a poet; that is to say, twice a man for the love of the flesh! When old age shall have attacked this body, without a heart, that I am dragging towards the worms of the grave, your love will no longer exist. By repeating this to you, do you know what I spare you? The fright of to-morrow."

"Ah! you are always speaking of the future! That is the eternal word you make use of to spoil the actual moment for me."

"That, my friend, is because I have only yours before me. That is because there are no tears to fill my eyes and blind me."

"Well, then, inexplicable but powerful creature," replied Allan, "tear my heart, in the name of your wisdom. Henceforward, I'll complain no more. Am I not your slave? Would I not give the blood of my veins, if needed, to wash your adored feet? Have you not exchanged your beauty for my heart, the contact of your mouth for my soul? However full of love and youth this heart may be, does your beauty not pay for it all? Ah! I would have bartered away heaven and earth for your smile, and I have had much more than that given to me by you!"

And with his desperate, fulminating, fretting lips, he pressed those that never resisted his. What ravages can the lightning wreak in places where it has laid all waste!

"How you have deceived me!" he said, feeling that her inward consciousness, frozen hard, melted not by his hot breath. "Ah, Yseult, how you have deceived me! Before knowing you better, I im-

agined to myself that you were still a woman, and that your soul, that eternal flower, might open itself to a love like mine. I said to myself that there existed a mysterious harmony between what finishes and what commences, between the virginity of a first love in a pure heart and the martyrdom of dead love in one that is withered. You seemed to me more touching than beautiful, and your beauty, which vacillated on your already darkened brow, tortured the feeling of the infinite in me, and made my love immense!"

"I understand, poor boy," she said dreamily, with a soft look as of youth, "and that might not have been an illusion! Yes! you might have met a woman of the very age of your mother, perhaps, and who, nevertheless, would not have loved you with the love she would have had for a son. Allan, you speak truly! By threatening to die soon, love and beauty may reach their utmost limits of intoxication and beauty. Perhaps God has willed that there shall be but one love worthy of the first, and that—the last. God has perhaps placed in that love an initiation in life, as a consolation for having lived—"

"Ah! speak always thus! say ever so!" interrupted Allan, with great feeling and tenderness,

hiding his face on Madame de Scudemor's shoulder. "Tell me that I was not a madman—that you might have loved me—that such a thing was possible."

"Yes! perhaps yes!" she rejoined in turn. "But there were not only years between us, Allan! years causing us to weep over lost beauty, when we fear that *he* will love another to-morrow. Ah! these years inflame still more the love one feels, by anxiety and jealousy, the double consciousness of the limits of our inward self. Alas! is it my fault if this love, so magnificent, since it forms the sum total of the heart, has been torn from my soul by the hand of Fate? and if this last sigh is impossible for me? Is it my fault if I resemble the Zahuri of Spanish superstition, who in the cemeteries see the corpse under the funereal shroud of turf and flowers that covers it?"

Bitter tears started in Allan's eyes.

"I love your tears!" she continued, being in one of those moods when the real woman invades the whole being. "Yes; I love your tears, poor boy! The death of my soul is worthily mourned by you, by you, whose soul is entire. Tears springing from the most serene sources of heaven, like incorruptible ether, and sealed up in the rock-crystal of a

pure heart, are more beautiful, as they fall upon so many buried pollutions, than those of Magdalen on the feet of Jesus. And even then, perchance, she was crying over herself. But you, child, are more generous; for you only weep for me, and unlike Jesus, who bore the Nine Heavens of pardon for that poor woman in His satisfied glance, I have no Paradise to offer you nor even to let you hope for."

"Ay, you have one for me, my Yseult!" he replied, with the eternal childishness of passion. "And if it is not the heaven of love, it is what most resembles it without hypocrisy; its delicious title! Why do you always say 'you' to me, as you speak, instead of 'thee'? I have often thought over it, and now I can tell you. Ah, if you were grateful for my tears, if you find them worthy to bathe that heart of yours that I should have so liked to warm into life again, if only for once! say to me: 'My Allan, I thank thee!' for am I not always thine, Yseult? Thine to my very last thought? I shall dream of love in its own language, and it will seem as if thou hadst given thyself to me a second time."

This fantasy of an impassioned soul touched the woman of sense.

"Yes, then, 'My Allan, I thank *thee!*'" she re-

peated, as he desired, passing her snowy hand with maternal coquetry over his hair, damp with the warmth of his burning brow.

The wretched young man breathed with delight at this word, and under the caress of her hand, as the turtle-dove opens its wings to the sun of May, he shuddered—like that feeble bird.

"Look you, Allan!" she continued, with the change of look we have when we seek within us something we fear to find at the bottom of our heart, in our dream-fragments and our confused remembrances. "I can say 'thou' to you if you wish it. My lips have lost the habit of that word, but I can make use of it as if I loved you, so much is it faded! so much is it empty! So now, boy, take and inhale the fragrance of the rind of the fruit they have devoured, without leaving a drop of juice for you!"

And in her expression was tender disdain, like that of reason when giving way to the exactions of silly sensibility, or to the capricious desires of a sick person. Allan lost all the happiness that she had at first created in saying "thou" to him. Thus she was always guilty of the infanticide of the joys she caused to spring up in the heart of her young lover.

"Listen, Yseult!" said he, after a pause of resolution; "henceforward I will ask you nothing more. The flowers you give are poisons. They do me more harm than good, and I'll have none of them! My God! why have I loved thee?"

He pressed her to his heart with delirious passion, lifting his eyes to heaven, as dumb and as inexpressive in its azure darkness as on the day of the Creation, before there was any pain or ignorance to send up from bended knees a wailing "why?"

Never had he so loved her, never had he loved her more. She replied no more to his query of despair than did He to whom he had cried "My God!" with that desire for knowledge which causes the birth of faith in our souls.

. . . . . .

They talked together for a long while still, but there came a moment when the declining sun warned Madame de Scudemor that it was time to return to the Château. They were a certain distance from it. Who knows, moreover, if this life of passion, now mingled so impetuously with hers, did not fatigue her a little? Who knows if resignation did not send up a wail from her soul, despite the pleasure that women feel in being vic-

tims? Who knows if she did not turn her head regretfully back towards solitude? But had she ever left it, even at the moment when it seemed most probable?

When Allan brought her horse, he did not leave her time to spring into the saddle from the hillock on which she stood, but seized her and lifted her from the ground as if she had been a light, thin young girl.

"You will hurt yourself, Allan!" she cried, in fear.

Such is the wrong construction of all women which they put upon the happiness one feels in exposing oneself to the delight of hurting ourselves for them, because we love them even to being willing to die for them. Convalescent, pale and exhausted, he held her pressed for an instant to his breast, which cracked beneath the weight of the robust creature. He experienced mad regret at not having been still more crushed by her idolised body, which never seemed sufficiently to be his.

When she was remounted, in that attitude which is almost guilty, so much does it betray all that a woman possesses of most intoxicating delight in her movements and rounded curves, he looked at her, aghast, overwhelmed, thrilling with desire. A

longing flame darted from the soul into the body. Poor wretch! he pressed upon Madame de Scudemor's dusty boot a kiss that would have burnt twenty-year-old lips. But she, knowing the frenzied fancies she had so often engendered in the men who had loved her, put her horse at a gallop and rode in the direction of the Château.

XVII.

Among the inexplicable wants after which the worn-out degenerate beings who struggle here below yearn, there is one perhaps in which all others are swallowed up. It is a mystery like that of all our life. It is melancholic, like all the feelings of the heart. It cries out to all. Men of genius hear it when they feel their head too weighty to be carried without aid, and who would have women's knees to support it, worthy cushions of the kingly crown; men of courage hearken to it, wishing that their dry lips could be refreshed and their sweating brow comforted. It is not love; ah, believe it is not that! Although it resembles love, it is more pure, and love does not always satisfy it. Often it precedes it. More often it follows. It is the desire of intimacy.

No! love which produces intimacy is not worth it, and the child is more beautiful than the mother. It has not that terrible and impetuous disposition which destroys life, as it does the happiness of love. It is infinite mercy, which has given the

breath of a human mouth the power to clear away the clouds rising from our uneasy heart to our brow. The most simple fact, and in which all intimacy resides, is: "Sweep away for me this crowd of black thoughts that assail me, oh, my dearest!" a hand grasped—and not even the pressure of a hand, a look—not even a look, but to feel united. And the heart is glad and rests, and that is enough for the eternal aspirations of exacting humanity.

At least, one might have thought that if the delirium of Allan's love had not been shared, the intimacy of life would not fail him, and that this great lullaby of the soul which puts it to sleep with delicious trifles would bring some refreshing elements into his. But there are some destinies so arid that the tuft of grass and the drop of water are both always wanting in the sand of which they are made. Allan, driven to despair by Madame de Scudemor, could find no relief in his *liaison* with her. She was so far above him that the confidence of intimacy could not be established between them. What is more to be feared than superiority in affection? It is an eagle that has mistaken its eyry, tearing the frozen birds which warm themselves beneath the great wings as if they were meant to shelter them!

When his head was cool, he feared the scorn of Madame de Scudemor. What profound ignorance of the nature of women was to be found in this youth! When they make us suffer they feel no scorn, however little we may be. The Countess de Scudemor, the type of fascination, of passion, of the weakness of womankind in its extremity, and who, thanks to special organisation and intelligence, had, by reflection, outlived the life of the heart which, when finished, generally carries away all that there is in a woman, and of this was she not the undeniable proof? If the Bible, the book of truth, had not said that woman should crush the head of the serpent beneath her heel, one might have thought that her heart would have prevented her from pressing down her foot.

On the other hand, the fear she caused him often by the brutal fashion in which she treated the illusions of his heart restrained him, when he felt tempted to rush towards her with all the strength that was in him. She kept him walled up in his own personality, and he only escaped from that painful captivity by the most terrestrial bypaths of love. The only moments in which this love made Allan less unhappy were those when his senses stifled imagination beneath their fleshly

veil. There is something which one must be fearless enough to set forth; once the motive of the Countess de Scudemor put aside, what could she have been for Allan? And these elevated motives separated them still more completely than the inert abandonment of herself.

So, the paroxysms over, Allan fell back into frightful prostration or in useless rage against Fate, finishing by despising himself. What would then become of him, when the first moments of the yearned-for possession and their intoxication, so new for him, had disappeared?

Madame de Scudemor, courageous and extraordinary woman, never gave herself the lie. She could not be reproached with cowardice or inconsistency, which is cowardice again. She judged Allan's passion for her. She knew that he was suffering, but she hoped that this agony would not last long enough to lead to the life that finishes in dull brutishness. Like many hypocrites, she might have made the grimace of enough love to cheat Allan, but she would have feared to arrest the decline of his feelings for her.

As it has been shown, these feelings had absorbed all maternal solicitude in Madame de Scudemor. Camilla, left to herself, had lived thus a

few days. Since *the night of the drawing-room* the Countess had pushed her daughter still more away from her. If Camilla was near her, she always found a pretext to send her away. It was necessary prudence, but a difficult task. Were not the precautions taken by Madame de Scudemor rather of a nature to make Camilla suspect what it was so important to hide from her? We know well that over her beautiful large eyes was the white bandage of innocence, as thick as the bandage of love, formed of a thousand rainbows. But from one moment to another her penetration might be awakened. Only one word is wanting to unfold the whole of a poem in a suddenly inflamed imagination; a glance that causes curious reflections; a mere nothing to trouble this formidable and ever-ignored something which is called "the soul," in all human languages. This idea tormented Madame de Scudemor. The slight abandonment which she had had in intimacy with her daughter disappeared. At bottom nothing was changed, and yet all was altered. It was sad, but was it cruel, for these two beings, between whom God had not placed that tenderness which is only great in a mother, because it is the adoration of a past consecrated in every way by trouble or happiness?

She often spoke of that to Allan.

"You must know," she said to him one evening, on the very spot where she had given herself up to him, on that divan where, ten times a day, disturbed to the profoundest depth of madness, and fainting beneath the burning weight of remembrance, Allan would furtively go and cover that spot with kisses where the cushions, still tepid, had given way beneath a well-known pressure, "I fear lest my daughter should see what is the matter with you, friend. I tremble sometimes for fear that the mystery that we alone know should be betrayed by some familiarity escaping from the fascination of the heart; by one of those irrevocable words which explain all that passionate glances have already taught. My poor Allan! you must hide your deplorable love better. Have some power over yourself! Have some respect for this calm childhood, of which I would prolong the charm as long as possible, so sure am I that my little girl will not escape her fate, for she has my blood in her veins, the passions that formerly ravaged her mother's heart!"

Such was the prayer of duty. Allan promised to hide everything before Camilla. This promise reminded him what impediments his love had to

vanquish, and he felt more than ever embittered against Camilla—the living and sacred obstacle.

Alas! there was a means to destroy the pain of a life of intimacy falsified and hindered; there was a way of getting out of this stifling dissimulation in front of others so as to be able to rest in his love as in the love of God, a bold way, the only audacity that supreme happiness has sometimes crowned. Very often, since he was in love, Allan's thoughts had wrecked themselves on the laughing shore of that archipelago, in the troubled sea of his dreams. Often enough his fancy had stopped at the door closed upon the domestic fireside, at which, like a proud and trembling beggar, it had not dared to knock. And this means, this refuge, whose very name burnt his lips, he did not even pronounce its name. Of all the pain of shame that reminded him of the misery of his fate, it was that which most lacerated his being.

His heart bled in silence as he thought of that. It was late. His face could hardly be seen. At the bottom of the garden, whence the view stretched from the window on to the marshes, the uncertain moon showed her circle on the misty horizon, rising as if regretfully from the earth which pushed her softly up in the dark sky. She made the thou-

sand pools scattered on the marsh all sparkle, and the fen was silvered by the pale light of her disc. It was Saturday.

"This life of three people," continued Madame de Scudemor gravely, as she went on expounding her ideas, "cannot remain as it is. Sooner or later, Camilla will discover all. That is what we must prevent at all cost. I have thought that to travel would be good and convenient. Fresh recurring interest would seize upon the inquisitiveness of my daughter, and occupy her in such a way as no longer to be a danger for her. On the other hand, there would be continual unexpected events, so that one can arrange one's life as one will without anybody finding anything strange about it. Finally, for yourself, Allan, who are dying from a fixed idea in this uniform everyday routine, to travel would be a good thing. Would you, this coming winter, like us all to go to Italy?"

"What care I?" he answered, with fatigue. "I care no more for Italy than for any other country in the world! Drag me where you like, Yseult! Anywhere, everywhere, will there be anything else than you for me?" he added, with passionately sensual languor, and in a tone that would have made all women die of melancholy.

She remained without a reply. Had Allan's accents caused her a little emotion? Did she understand what he was suffering from? Or was she reflecting on the nothingness of all that she could do for him, to whom she had given all that remained to her?

XVIII.

The Willows, generally so full of people, presented an unaccustomed aspect in that autumn of 1845, being inhabited by these three persons only: Madame de Scudemor, her daughter, and Allan de Cynthry, the young man whom she brought there every year, and who could have been easily taken for her son. They were only three in these vast empty apartments, three to walk in the long wide alleys of the dumb garden. The gate on the opposite side to the marsh was hardly ever opened more than once a day, to let Madame de Scudemor's carriage pass out as she went for a drive on the neighbouring high-roads for an hour or two in the evening, to the manifest interest of the young girls then returning from their day's work, and who looked upon the passage of these three handsome, pale people, half-lying in this graceful gondola-like landau, swinging on its dazzling wheels, beneath the silky rays of a soft October evening in Normandy, when the most delicately beautiful

woman can receive their heat full in the face, with lifted veil.

Sometimes Camilla remained in the Château. Allan blessed those days; he could then speak of his love to Madame de Scudemor. For, as it has been said, no intimacy could exist between him and her. Intimacy is a thing of retreat and mystery; we feel deliciously that it exists, but externally it only manifests itself imperfectly. It is like the breath of the spirit in Nature. This secret expansion of two souls, silent, invisible, they possessed it not! But in the place of this indescribable intimacy of which Allan bitterly felt the absence, he forced himself to create another and more clumsy one, but also powerless and fatal. It was the entire and complete knowledge of the woman he loved, the profound comprehension of her soul. To see what was in the idol, to pierce this resisting darkness; to clear away these obscure remains—this is the movement that stirs us all, our intelligence rising from the knees where passion has forced it, insatiable curiosity which always presses on, carrying love with it, when all the mysteries are exhausted.

Allan did not know what he was doing. He obeyed the laws of feeling which sought to know,

because to know is still to possess! But Madame de Scudemor knew that as he did; so she laid bare all her thoughts to him, as she had already given her naked history. She of whom the "I" held so small a place in society, the language she spoke there being no more than elegant and vague commonplace gossip, magnificent abstraction, bought by dint of sufferings, impossible for any other woman than one like her, she became selfish with her lover, not in the interest of his love, but in order to hasten its end. She answered all Allan's questions, analysed herself minutely with him unto the very last folds of her soul, because that was to give herself up all the more; and to abandon herself to him always, as much as possible, was to provoke that vast state of boredom which cuts off and finishes all passion!

It was thus these spoilt children of civilisation, these happy folk, these rich gentry, as they were called in the neighbourhood, rode about in their careless leisure, in the bosom of the most beautiful country in the world. Perhaps, as they passed, did they cause a murmur from the labourer bent since dawn over the furrows, although life had also miscarried for them and was not sweet and easy, both being branded on the brow with the marks

that proclaim equality in suffering and justify Providence.

Yseult, in spite of the beauty which irradiated from her during these melodious sunsets whose rays gilded her like a poetic ruin where the ivy attaches its green bonds, was older in reality and more bent than the beggar-woman seated on a heap of stones by the roadside, and Allan, the fine young fellow of undecided build, was yet more withered than the village mothers whose sons had reached his age. Both suffered from an unknown malady. Their bearing was tranquil, their attitudes indolent and careless; but like the poor woman who weeded with her nails, like the man whose sweat was soaked up by the furrow, they also had a task to fulfil, some rough work which breaks one down and is exhausting, during an eternal day under the eye of God. They talked, and if those bright wheels had made no noise as they turned, their words might have been heard. Their discourse was elegant and harmonious, but unintelligible for these simple country folks, like the startling light on both their brows that the sun and manual labour had not tarnished. There was something so human in their lineaments, so familiar to all of this world, that without understanding their grief they never-

theless seemed to suspect it, and Humanity recognising itself in them tried to stifle its sneers.

"Yseult," said Allan to her during these drives, "you told me the story of your life, but you never told me what had followed your last love. You whose strength had been at first so great, did you fall all at once into the gulf in which you are now at the bottom? When that love betrayed you, did you not still struggle? Was there nothing in that wasted life to which you could still cling? I know of naught but love, I only know you, my Yseult! but it is said that love betrayed has still many a noble refuge—maternal love and friendship for the weak, with meditation for stronger natures, and God for all. For you and for us also!"

"God!" answered the unhappy atheistic woman, dead in Him as in life, dropping her marble eyes, as if she wished to drag herself away from that great idea of God, written in the infinite horizons where the sun was slowly dying. "God! that is a high and solemn word. It is often on my lips, as if in that syllable there was a secret consolation, and I know not if it hides aught else than cowardice or ignorance. The idea of God remained always vague and misty for me. It did not set one of my pains at rest. By bending me to religious exer-

cises, which are good when the heart is interested in them, bad when it is filled with other ideas; since my childhood, had they not made me disgusted with religion? Seeing but one goal in life—happiness in love—I had loved furiously, and in the prodigalities of my soul I had exhausted all my perfumes at the foot of mortal altars. I had no ashes of consumed affection to give to this begging God who contents Himself with the rags of love, if it is true that He so begs! The religious feeling is only the want of support, an eternal weakness that keeps man in cruel slavery, and to which we have given many names, so as not to blush at it. I had had my share of this weakness. I had been a victim of it. In me it was so great, Allan, that I slid to the ground, and did not stretch out my tired arms mechanically to seize this reed which always eludes our grasp! When I was most unhappy, when most wounded by the passions, I would have liked to stiffen out my breast against all blows. I thought to be strong-minded. Often a tear, which the heart had not been able to swallow up, furrowed with its burning streak the mask of bronze I had put on, and I would have given my beauty for that tear not to have been shed, even in the solitude where I hid it. I would have cut off

the waving curls of my hair to stop all the blood that flowed from my wounds. I leant upon my pride, and I looked in the glass to see if this attitude suited me! At that juncture, I might without a doubt have leant upon that idea of God as I leant upon pride. But since then, both became useless. Human nature begged for quarter, and Fate was implacable. Of all this haughty stoicism, there remained to the woman not a strip to hide the nakedness of her humiliated pride. The disdain of myself seized me, superb scorn, with a fierce laugh which died away on my lips like the last reclamation of conquered pride. I asked no more of my soul nor of life. God—does that not mean life accepted or cursed? Is it not an idea of our soul? I did not want God, and I thought no more of Him."

"And friendship?" said Allan.

"Friendship!" rejoined Madame de Scudemor. "I had always disdained it, when my heart possessed more than that! Since then I have scorned it still more. It is a bastard and egotistical sentiment, often the accouplement of two vanities which take each other's arm in turn. It is an arrangement of life. And only a great hazard when miserable dissensions, petty opinions, or low interests do not tear up the lease! Love is selfish, too, I

know; but at least it transposes its *ego* into another *ego,* and changes its place. Friendship keeps its own entirely, and changes not its residence but with the loss of being. Doubtless, one dies for one's friend; but whom can one not die for? And what does one isolated case of suffering prove? But to accept all the faults of character, all the aberrations of the mind; to love despite the tortures of vanity, in spite of the scorn of intelligence; to love notwithstanding the weariness of every day—that is what friendship does not do! What is the superiority that does not spoil these connections combined solely for comfort? Superiority of wit, of beauty, of health, of riches, and even reaching to services rendered—all are fatal or mortal to it. Is it not said that for friendship to exist, there must be between minds and dispositions certain angles which should tally and fit in together? What does that mean? That friendship has no existence of its own. It has so little that it borrows words to express it from love, and as if ashamed of the imposture, speaks never in its name. Two friends shake hands when they meet, and write 'Yours truly' at the close of their letters; but what do they say all their lives? They converse about their mutual interests, and never of their feelings; these

are confidences that cross when they do not trespass on each other. But all fine feeling is exclusive, and what soul was ever great enough or small enough to live only on friendship?

"When I had been happy, I did not seek relief from happiness by confiding in the bosom of a friend of my sex. I found room for it in my heart. It was large enough for that. When misfortune overtook me, I threw my tears at no one's head. I had no longer the egotism that seeks to be interesting by its sufferings, and which enjoys the interest it inspires. What should I have found around me? Curiosity that interrogates as it sticks a finger in the wound, or the pitying wail which is only flattery, and boredom that is deaf. Besides, I told you, Allan, that even had I seen consolation in friendship, I had lost the instinct of seeking support.

"As for maternal affection, my last love had carried it away after having polluted it. I never loved Camilla much. If you suffered from a few caresses bestowed on that child, you know now why I made them—these caresses that my heart put no more warmth in. When I could have loved Camilla, I only loved Octave; and this child, who perpetually came between us, had inflicted too great

torture upon me! If I told you that one day the thought of Camilla had prevented me from killing myself, it was, perhaps, because I did not love her any more. One reproaches one's self for not loving, and one becomes generous. But this generosity lasted no longer in me than the idea of suicide which supposes the strength of a coward, the force of flight, the power to escape. I had reached the torpor of weakness. Out of weakness, I acted with virile courage. Prostration stood me in lieu of resistance, and I let myself live, because, in the universal wreck of the faculties of my soul it was as indifferent to me to live as to die."

"Oh, unfortunate, most unfortunate woman!" said Allan, appalled. "And did you never feel yourself less unfortunate for a moment? Never, at some instant towards the evening, in the presence of beautiful and calm Nature, your hand on your daughter's shoulder, have you lifted your eyes from the path to look at the sky, whose serenity is so strengthening? Never, when you saw the horizon cleared of the evening clouds, have you repeated to yourself, like an old chorus of hope, 'Come, it will be fine to-morrow'?"

"No, Allan, no!" replied Yseult. "Misfortune

and love have veiled Nature for me. The right of sanctuary in this vast temple exists no more for me. We live in ourselves before living in Nature. This fatal *ego* always comes to tear you from the sweetest contemplations, and death alone extinguishes this obstinate personality, and melts it in the midst of all things. But in front of death Nature is powerless, and the poets have only suffered by half. Oh, Allan, when the human face has been seen—the greatest marvel of this world, and also the most adored!—to change by degrees despite our desire to make it eternal; the tender look which expressed love suddenly grows stupefied with indifference, henceforward Nature is dumb, and, like Œdipus, in Greek poetry, one may tear out one's eyes with the hooks of one's mantle. What matters it if the stars shine or fade, since the only planets we believed in are lost!

"That is why, Allan, I did not retire from the world. I finished living in the place where I dwelt, and I have not fled because I should have taken refuge in myself. I was too unhappy to affect anything, and I took my share of this idle and insignificant drawing-room life which did not weigh upon me more than anything else, because I was absolutely weaned from all things. Believe me,

Allan, one can quickly get in the habit of all these extraneous details of existence, which are insupportably in the way when young and full of passion! I accepted them without repugnance, because I had nothing better to prefer to them. A visit to pay, an evening to be passed out of my own house, cost me no effort, and so I would go. I did not shut myself up face to face with my grief, because I had not the cult of it. I did not try to forget it, because I could not change myself. There are people who put ashes on their heads, and go into mourning for their happiness. They may be right, and I neither blame nor accuse them. There are others, on the contrary, who whiten their sepulchre, and they may be even more in the right. I belonged to the latter class. But if later on I took my crown of scorn off my brow, where it had merely been the broken vizard of a helmet, out of indifference I left there the frivolous ornaments of the woman.

"What society was for me, so were books. I was born with rather powerful faculties, but during childhood I had only been taught my catechism, and when I left the convent I was already too sensual to cultivate my mind. If, when unhappiness set in I had recourse to books which

were of no service to me, it was only to help me out from beneath the weight of my first remembrances. The books were soon rejected. Since then, trouble forced me to think, but what I know, my poor Allan, grief alone has taught me! Alas! in this, my story is that of all women, the savages of civilisation whose only true education consists in their wants and pains! These volumes for which I had no room during the frivolous agitation of my youth, I tried to open in the days when all deserted me, but I peered over them with listless eyes. Whatever amount of genius they bore witness to, I felt no emotion, and I only judged them as proofs of mental strength, or vanquished difficulties. I did not possess the great sympathy of the mind. What could they tell me, Allan, these men of genius who are admired by all? Did they describe happiness? The happiness of my life cast a shade on their pictures. Was it trouble that they sought to sketch? I bitterly coveted this grief, as a blessing beyond my reach, for it was more beautiful and poetical than mine. You see, Allan, that I knew more than they did!"

She would talk like this for a long while, before Allan would think of interrupting her. And often as the carriage stopped in front of the Châ-

and fresh and alluring waves of thought which sought for unrestrained action, as she sprang by daily bounds of hidden sensation to adolescence. By a strangely energetic phenomenon there seemed to be a heavily laden future in this organisation of a little girl who had been intensely joyous for such a long time, and which made one anxiously ask what would become of the lass when she should no more laugh in that manner.

It appeared as if that day had come. Little by little all smiles had left her bold, rounded lips. By the education that Madame de Scudemor declared was the only one received by women, that of injustice and suffering, Allan had forced her fecund and rich nature to no longer gush out impetuously, and pride, with its eloquent falsity, had become the poor child's resource. When her mother spoke of her sulkiness she was calumniating her. It was not that state of changeable vanity that held the secret of Camilla's latest behaviour towards Allan. Madame de Scudemor knew well that Allan's manner would have wounded less lively susceptibility than that of her daughter, but the mother had not watched the sisterly sentiment that the habit of living with Allan had developed in Camilla; of Allan so caressing, occupying him-

self with her, and who possessed much greater tenderness than her mother, whose hands were always so cold beneath her kisses! Therefore, Madame de Scudemor could not know what deception had struck a blow at the heart of the neglected child, with regard to a change which her ignorance prevented her understanding.

On the other hand, in the presence of her mother, whose eyes were sometimes fixed upon her, as if to read her, Camilla was often much more reserved than sad. There was no reverie as when, during Allan's illness, she was alone in the fields, but she was tenderly serious, with long, slow looks. She retired within herself beneath the gaze of Madame de Scudemor, whose glance did not beam with the warm expression of a mother. Besides, this was an involuntary movement which the offhand ways and mere physical kindness of Madame de Scudemor sufficed to explain, as well as the absence of that peaceful, strong, and quenching love of a daughter for her mother, which Camilla did not know of, and which does not always fall to the share of those who would most appreciate its celestial sweetness. Among the disinherited beings of this world the most wretched are those cast away by their mothers, poor orphans of the

heart, most sacred of all, even to orphans themselves. Allan's fraternal feeling for Camilla had taken the place of all that she otherwise yearned for. When these feelings were refused her, is it astonishing that she should regret them?

But she no longer let childish complaints escape her, like those with which she had overwhelmed Allan at the beginning of the alteration of his conduct. She had engulfed all her grief within her breast. Already there was an abyss as deep and as black as a crater in her bosom, as frail as a nightingale's, and which a thrust from the thorn of an eglantine would have pierced through and through.

And the greatest evil of Allan's passion was perhaps this perpetual wounding of a pure and deep feeling in a loving soul. It was pain forced upon an innocent creature who had done nothing to be made to suffer. Oh! passion! passion! believe not in its devotion, nor in its tears! Stifle it, if you would not be cruel! See, this youth was good, and he had loved Camilla. On the head of this child was accumulated all his remembrances, the crown of years, the crown of pearls glittering adorably in her hair, dishevelled now as in the dead days of her sweet childhood. Since Madame de

Scudemor had ceased to be a mother as well for Allan as she had been for Camilla, the man became as ferocious for his adopted sister as a wounded vulture.

Nevertheless, the jealousy excited by a single caress was now lost in that of a greater kind, not directed against a child, the detested symbol of affection for another, atrocious vision of a life changed into another life, to pursue him with a resemblance and a name! Now it was the whole past of the woman so fatally loved which Allan had to hate and fear; all that full and long youth of which he knew the history, the history nailed to his conscience, after having passed through the marrow of his bones! Each day that used up the intoxication of possession exalted this sombre jealousy. It was only one thought, but an intolerable one. There are—she had told him so—no poniards against the past, and one cannot play the spy on a memory. But Allan could not understand that this grandly unfortunate Yseult could have so profoundly separated her past life from her actual existence by the entire breadth of her scorn; that she held the men she had adored so low that she had not even honoured them by the insults of the betrayed woman. He could not understand

that she could have so thoroughly become a Niobe with her eternal marble impassibility, when the children of her dreams, more handsome than the children of the legend, died, one after the other, beneath the implacable arrows of Fate. For Allan, it was impossible to admit that jealousy should no more exist in his heart, so violently upheaved; he did not believe that she was great enough not to feel regret. For that woman the past was not as it is for us—souls subject to common infirmities—a soft spectre, with rose-scented breath, coming to draw back the curtains of our bed during our nights of sleeplessness; the skeleton of the cherished being, escaped from its coffin, returning to kiss with the lips that are gone the lips we possess, and still having something soft and warm where her mouth used to be.

But even more than the knowledge of Madame de Scudemor's soul, a dominant, unconquerable fact was there, containing the greatest of all human grievances, absorbing the poisoned germs of Allan's jealousy in despair more bitter in another way than that in which jealousy could have thrown him. He was not beloved, and he loved! There was no one preferred to him. If in this heart which was not his there had been a preference

for another, at least there would have been the possibility of being loved as well. There would have been the possibility of vengeance. But such miserable compensations did not exist. He was not beloved, and he loved! It was simple enough; but did there exist a misfortune more complete than that? Moralists and poets have not shown sufficiently what unrevealed secrets of torture such a fact—not to be loved—encloses in the heart of the man who loves. All pales, fades away, and becomes almost sweet in the presence of this supreme fact, of which the analysis would be a Gorgon book for confiding and happy souls. To love her who has softened her look as she glanced at you, who has counted you—who has not even counted you at all!—amongst the indifferent passers-by, is it not unwitting brutality in the face of which the inner man becomes cowardly and trembles, as if threatened? One dies of love—one does more than die for it, one suffers from it—and if we could show that love as we feel it, she would care no more than she would for a song, and quietly turn her head another way. What horrible irony, which by reason of its depth becomes irony no longer! Nevertheless, the mind conceives the uselessness of rage, and when one perpetually quiv-

ers with the temper of passion, one sees one's self shuddering, and viewing one's own state from the lofty standpoint of our reason, we see ourselves strangely abnormal and frightful objects of pity Finally, when the loved one grows perfidious and leaves us, this anguish which troubled our view, making the world look as if it was ruled no more by intelligent laws, is only so horribly cruel because we still love some one who has ceased to love us!

Such was the fatality that weighed Allan down. The certainty that he was not loved and never would be, finished by annihilating all other feelings. There was but room in his soul for infinite grief, which reflection sharpened each day more, and remaining ever strong although sensibility gave way, because when the nerves are broken down the intellect remains eternally.

And it was grief that was well-nigh majestic, overwhelming a being so young and so handsome. It cast upon his angelic frame, which was not yet a man's robust stature, something like senile fatigue. The soul had lived quicker than the body, for what could life tell him now that he did not know? Was there greater grief than his? Is not all that from which humanity suffers summed up

in some deceived desire, in some gasping wish for the Impossible?

In looking at Allan, superficial observers would have said that he was experiencing great difficulty in getting over the illness that had nearly killed him. But, alas! the malady was still deeper than if it had touched upon the source of life—although he exhausted that also in the furious and sad voluptuousness with which he satiated himself, all solitary in the ice-cold arms of Madame de Scudemor.

After the days, nothing would satisfy him but the nights; and not in hasty fragments, but entire. And this woman, to whom he only said, "I will!" in the fury of the sensual passion he felt for her, and who could have brought him to his knees with a look, had bent her head like a humble serving-maid, and had not asked for the chalice to be withdrawn from her lips. Besides, was it not better, she thought, to cross this fiery desert from which she wished to save Allan, than to drag him there step by step? She accomplished her work of devotion and pity with glorious submission, according to the views of his virile mind, weakened by the reality of the passions of which every phase was familiar to her.

The door of Camilla's bed-chamber opened into the apartment of Madame de Scudemor. For fear of awakening formidable suspicions or authorising awkward questions, Madame de Scudemor could certainly not put Camilla in another room. So Allan only went to see Yseult when the night was far advanced. He was obliged to wait until Camilla's slumbers were deep enough to preclude all fear of troubling them by the noise of a door or the creaking of the flooring beneath a clumsy footfall. Thus, when all the house was clothed in silence, and the servants were asleep, Allan crossed the long corridors with furtive steps, often stopping to breathe, between two throbs of the heart. Some emotion resembling fright was fatally mixed with that act of going and finding at night, surreptitiously, the woman he loved, and the thought of whom caused rivers of fire to course through his veins.

Then, when morning dawned, as yet imperceptible—a pearly grey speck, before being rosy, on the horizon of night—he came out of Madame de Scudemor's room, as pale as Romeo dropping from the embrace of Juliet on to the balcony where he hung to say a last farewell. But, unlike Romeo, he was not pale from the double pallor of happi-

ness and fear which showed itself on the brows moist with kisses given and received. His ashy look would have been more vulgar if the noble grief of his soul had not made its hue diaphanous —like those clouds of thick and deadened whiteness that the moon makes ghostly by flooding them with her luminous, silvery sheen.

XX.

The clock struck one of the half hours. They knew not what hour it was, but doubtless everybody at the Willows had been long asleep. They alone were awake. Their eyes were open like those of a guilty or a happy couple. The man enlaced the woman who had possessed the first feelings of his heart with all the caresses of a love which makes the most disturbing part of sensual delight quite chaste. She put into play the last devotion of which she was capable; was that a crime? The man was in love, and felt that his love was useless, and never would he be repaid by anything resembling the least feeling of love—horrible anguish! The woman, showing inalienable sympathy in inalienable weakness, feared that this love, inspired by her, would destroy, before destroying itself, his life made to be accepted on condition of giving another in exchange; was that happiness?

"Let me be!" he said, as if he feared resistance

after so many voluntary abandonments. "Look at me, so that I may see you!"

And placing a hand on Madame de Scudemor's forehead, he pushed her nearly backwards, while his other hand grasped her shoulder near the neck.

The bosom, veiled by a light, low-cut muslin, was slightly rounded by the position she was then in, more seated than lying, leaning upon one arm placed at an angle, the other stretched on the bed, and covered in muslin like the breast, but tightened in such a way as to give to the wrist of that white hand, which was rather long, but so expressive, more perfect grace still.

The room was dark, for the lamp that was burning on a table only dispersed part of the obscurity through one of the bed-curtains, half dropping in forgetful negligence. There was only light in the mirrors, placed in several spots, and even on the bed where they were, and where nearly all the gleam of the lamps fell.

Delirium still subsisted on Allan's lineaments, but it was the delirium which was no more just then but the remnant of a storm on the murmuring edge of a cloud carried along by a dumb breeze, a last heave of his breast, a rapid interval of peace in troubled days.

His devouring, tigerish idea, that this woman loved him not, again rose in him during the momentary appeasement of Ugolino-like pleasure which would soon again fall to its carnal meal. In forcing her to look at him, and by plunging his gaze into those other eyes of infinite abstraction, he sought for some fresh intoxication, so as to think no more that she loved him not.

She looked at him, but in the depths of her eyes, free of all sensuality, it might have been said that a more dreamy thought than those she usually had was to be seen therein.

"What are you thinking about?" he said.

"I thought that four months ago," she answered, "I was here alone, in this very position, and that I rose from my bed to write to you. You know what I wrote. Just now, I asked myself if there was another way of saving you."

Allan's brows became slowly knitted, but his eyes flashed forth no light. This movement of the flesh of the forehead was all that passed the threshold of his heart. His hand that was on the Countess Yseult's neck fell along her hair, which a moment before the same hand had unbound and draped round her head, so calmly majestic, a contrast that he adored, and which caused her to re-

semble some captive queen, or some great pride wounded, or stoicism bent down. It was not so as to bathe his hands in the floating masses of her thick tresses, to quench the thirst of his mouth, that he always liked to make her hair stream around them when they were thus near together; but it was a want of tender, offended imagination. He wished to soften her lofty and grave physiognomy, to give it an air of youth, an appearance of disorder that it did not possess, some lying distraction, but which might have sufficed for that instant of the infinite soul. He wished for all that would make her step down from the intangible heights of reason, and make her resemble a woman, weak by love and lust—not pity. He was a born poet—twice a poet, since he was in love; and he would have Yseult dishevelled as the poet uses a rhyme or a metaphor; for such was the rhyme and the metaphor of that incoercible poem that he could not realise.

His arm, thrown over her bowed shoulders, gave way, and dropped lower down on the softened pillows. What she had said had detached his languid, contemplative caress from her—this caress of the other shore of ardent pleasures, to which one returns with supplicating regret when they are

gone. A true word, innocent and good, had interrupted the caress, as a childish finger causes ripened fruit to fall, only by touching it.

The melancholy languor of Allan's sentiment did not last, but it was not the soul that buried it in his love. That is often quite enough for poor human nature. His arm, falling from the shoulders on to the bed, had perhaps touched upon some less thick material, the swelling of some part of the rounded form, more exciting in its voluptuous mystery, a revelation of nudity from some disarranged fold of the nightdress in a careless attitude, or a quivering if imperceptible touch, which was enough to make his breast swell again with rage, and the storm broke again with its frightful rumbling murmurs.

"Ah! now you can din your eternal words of ice into my ears!" he broke out. "They no longer strike into my heart like drops of venom! There is something, Yseult, which is better than you, and which will preserve me from you! It is your supreme beauty, which you gave to me as something you despised, and which causes me to forget what you repeat to me unceasingly, so that I hearken to you no more!"

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"Oh! I have never loved but your beauty," said he, halting in his speech a thousand times, speaking in strident tones, with a false, breathless, discomposed voice, "this beauty I now hold in my arms! Never, in my most ardent dreams, have I desired any other happiness than to be thus breast to breast with you! Oh! love is but a kiss, a bite, blood that flows and mingles, a night that we pass, days like the nights, nights like this, and death to end all! Such is love! And the rest! Is there

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"I cannot believe it, although I wish it, Yseult!" he continued. "It is not true that I am happy! It is not true that love is what I said! In vain I lie in your bosom and drink myself mad with mortal intoxication, my heart avenges itself on my rambling reason. Ah! it is more likely that the contrary is the case. Love is to be loved, and nothing else! And I," said he, his voice breaking off into sobs, "I am very unhappy!"

Seeing him overcome with such affliction, Yseult lifted him up, and said to him, as he now was weeping far from her, his head buried in the pillows, at the farther end of the bed:

"Yes, Allan, you are unhappy, but do not give way to such despair! Have a little courage, for my sake, whom you love!"

Poor woman! Unhappy also, for she felt the impotency of what she said, which caused sharp anguish in her.

"Look you!" he replied, lifting his face, all vio-

aught more? What care I? It cannot belong to love!" and he laughed. "What matters your speech or your silence, as long as you move not your lips from under mine! What matters if nothing beats in this breast, as long as I am more master of it than your child! Ah! the rest is only fit to fill up the hours during which we do not love, when, weak and tired, we return to humanity! But love is only love because it fills up a vacant life. Let it fill up until it bursts, who cares? Love me! Love me not! Words only, striking the air with sterile sounds; perhaps lies? Is it not you that I hold to me here now, Yseult? You are mine! I am happy!"

And he proclaimed his felicity with accents dragged from so far down in his soul that pure-minded people would have tremblingly doubted the celestial origin of the happiness they often hoped for.

But expiation followed close upon blasphemy. In him the senses palpitated still, while to this announced happiness the heart replied by supreme negation. Who has not felt, in the soul's depths, these sudden movements, at a moment when they believed that the inward drama had only to play itself out henceforward without a single struggle?

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let through his stifling pressure in the pillow, and still wet with his tears, "I would sooner have preferred jealousy than what so wounded my soul! I have felt the pangs of jealousy when I thought that you loved Camilla because of her father! I was jealous when you told me that you had also loved as I love you, with the same frenzy! Oh! that makes true suffering! But not so much as to know that one is not loved, and never will be! Not so much as the tortures of the damned in love to which I am condemned, Yseult. Only that is intolerable. I love you, and you love me not!"

And with a tearing asunder like Laocoön, that image of destiny on this earth, and especially of his, he repeated the fatal words:

"I love you, and you love me not!"

Many a time and oft Madame de Scudemor had noticed that he was a prey to this thought, but never as on this fatal night. The impassibility she had attained by weakness as many reach it by strength of will, was touched in the face of such grief. Perhaps might she have wished to feel her heart beat again, even though she once more risked being betrayed, so as to spare Allan such agony. But this was the vain regret of generosity crushed by the Impossible; the Juggernaut of human des-

tinies; a serpent that holds in its folds your feet, hands, breast, and throat, when, three paces off, you see your children dying!

He seized her throat violently in his two hands as if he was going to strangle her.

"Oh, Yseult," said he, "Yseult, sooner give me back my jealousy, my cruel, concentrated, devouring jealousy! Give it back to me! You would do me such good! It will be like the dew of heaven to my soul; like balm on open wounds! Ah! can you not start that flame burning again in my heart? Speak to me of that Margarita, who unwittingly brushed away the bloom of your soul's flowers; of the miserable cowards whom you allowed to crush their leaves; of your husband who flung them back, withered, at you when you had overwhelmed him with them; and of the most loved one of all, who consumed them to the roots! Tell me that you still love him! Tell me that it is not true that he is forgotten; that one does not forget a man loved with such humble adoration, that upon his remembrance shines a ray of that wonderful flame which lit up his brow on the days of kisses and embraces, in the nights full of swooning and ecstasy! Show me the place of that portrait, so long worn, you told me, that the mark

His devouring, tigerish idea, that this woman loved him not, again rose in him during the momentary appeasement of Ugolino-like pleasure which would soon again fall to its carnal meal. In forcing her to look at him, and by plunging his gaze into those other eyes of infinite abstraction, he sought for some fresh intoxication, so as to think no more that she loved him not.

She looked at him, but in the depths of her eyes, free of all sensuality, it might have been said that a more dreamy thought than those she usually had was to be seen therein.

"What are you thinking about?" he said.

"I thought that four months ago," she answered, "I was here alone, in this very position, and that I rose from my bed to write to you. You know what I wrote. Just now, I asked myself if there was another way of saving you."

Allan's brows became slowly knitted, but his eyes flashed forth no light. This movement of the flesh of the forehead was all that passed the threshold of his heart. His hand that was on the Countess Yseult's neck fell along her hair, which a moment before the same hand had unbound and draped round her head, so calmly majestic, a contrast that he adored, and which caused her to re-

semble some captive queen, or some great pride wounded, or stoicism bent down. It was not so as to bathe his hands in the floating masses of her thick tresses, to quench the thirst of his mouth, that he always liked to make her hair stream around them when they were thus near together; but it was a want of tender, offended imagination. He wished to soften her lofty and grave physiognomy, to give it an air of youth, an appearance of disorder that it did not possess, some lying distraction, but which might have sufficed for that instant of the infinite soul. He wished for all that would make her step down from the intangible heights of reason, and make her resemble a woman, weak by love and lust—not pity. He was a born poet—twice a poet, since he was in love; and he would have Yseult dishevelled as the poet uses a rhyme or a metaphor; for such was the rhyme and the metaphor of that incoercible poem that he could not realise.

His arm, thrown over her bowed shoulders, gave way, and dropped lower down on the softened pillows. What she had said had detached his languid, contemplative caress from her—this caress of the other shore of ardent pleasures, to which one returns with supplicating regret when they are

gone. A true word, innocent and good, had interrupted the caress, as a childish finger causes ripened fruit to fall, only by touching it.

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instead of crushing it, because it is placed in the strongest part of man, like an irradiation of God Himself. Joined hands are only a symbol—a look full of light or tears; a colourless reverberation of the invisible lamp burning in the temple of the heart; the veiled firmament in the dark night of humanity that we guess at, where would be blinding stars of flame if we could see them. The Unknown! torture and delight!—is it not that which implores the sympathy of another soul, and those ties which are not merely the vulgar embraces of the arms? Thus, when this yearning for sympathy remains yawning like an abyss, when the immensity of the heart, which reaches as far as the waves of some infinite ocean, finds not the azure universal globe of another heart to enlace, there escapes a great wail from the soul, and that was the cry uttered by Allan. He was a young man whom the stupor of sensuality had not besotted with its torpedo-like contact, and he was not content with the love-philter of which he drank fully, and which only satisfied one kind of desire.

Doubtless fatigued by such a succession of shocks, Madame de Scudemor had fallen asleep. She had not bound up her hair again. She had not troubled to hide her bosom once more. The light of

the lamp softened the slightly masculine curves of her face, and darkened the silken down which shaded her lips, softly closed in slumber. Although pale, and her eyes closed like a dead woman already buried, without a dream to send her a particle of shadow from the end of its wing as it might pass over her brow and her eyes, everything in her nevertheless revealed deep and concentrated life. There was not one of her veins that did not give evidence of her vitality; there was not a beat of her arteries which was not the sign of strength. Every pore perspired with the force of existence. To listen to her long and calm breathing, one might have thought that a new world was about to escape from her lightly lifted bosom. In vain coming age—inexorable age—had printed its insults on the forehead, which thinking and suffering had aged before its time; on the mouth, which no longer had the sadness of regret; on her hair, the blackness of which was now not quite pure; but all these apparent scratches on this beautiful block of Carrara marble had not eaten deeper into the invulnerable stone. If time had not conquered, at least it seemed to have stopped still, astonished, before beginning the struggle again which could not be exhausted in a few days. And it was beautiful,

this sort of slowness with which a mortal creature was attacked, as if the wielder of the hour-glass feared that he had to do with something immortal.

Allan, one hand on the head of a Sphinx of the bed; Allan, on his knees, at the side of Madame de Scudemor, stared at her with eyes half sad and half delighted. He admired this plenitude of life, this luxury of strength and rest. Leaning over her impassible bosom did he listen to the murmurs of the torrent of life uselessly circulating in this powerful organisation, but which, alas! gushed no longer from it? Or on her neck, so vigorously and softly moulded, did he follow with his eyes the ardent trace of his hands, which he had placed thereon in a fit of fury with which he reproached himself?

"Oh," he thought, "still so much youth, but not for me! Even in this divine body which she abandons to me, I have not the power to augment by one pulsation more the life that animates it! Beneath my heart it is the same as it is now. And yet how immense seems that vitality of hers! How that ocean would froth and foam if there existed a breath strong enough to lash it into fury! How beautiful she would be! O God! if love had but one last feeble ray of light for her! How happi-

ness bestowed by her would be unlike the delights that other women give! With what impetuosity would I not yield up my life to be devoured by this joy, too destroying to last! My God! how beautifully she could kill me!"

And he wept. The cry of the osprey was alone heard without. He wept. The tears fell slowly on the bosom of Madame de Scudemor, and dried there, one after the other, as useless as on a coffin.

What a strange thing! He cried over life as one weeps at death. But as he sobbed for that life which passed in her lips with mockery, and which he could not absorb in himself, he also groaned for the loss of a lifeless heart, most deplorable death of all!

XXI.

The remembrance of that cruel night was present in every thought of Madame de Scudemor like a funereal vision. Pursued by the spectacle of the unhappiness which crushed Allan de Cynthry, she searched in her great soul to see if there was not still some other sacrifice to be made in order to attest the pity in the name of which she had acted. What was admirable in her, what never weakened, what supported her, was the horrible hope that Allan's passion was mortal. In presence of a love that any other woman would have been proud to inspire, she had never felt one instant's emotion at her saddening certitude. The scepticism of an illusion had not recaptured her, and she kept, purely and profoundly, her faith in nothingness that reposed in her breast. She was a quiet atheist, putting her trust in death as the fanatic in promises of immortality; and she waited patiently, because she was fully convinced; boasting not, for atheism is as silent as scorn.

But a doctor alleviates the sufferings of a man

attacked by mortal illness, awaiting until he should fall, he and his thoughts, to be stifled in the grave, and that is called being humane. But if pain is stronger than vain science, what remains to be done, except to violently precipitate the being created for death into the tomb? When this terrible consequence before which men more cowardly than their doctrines have started back, when this supreme resource also fails—inert and lugubrious thing!—human Pity covers up its face and waits in dumb horror, until there only remains a corpse to lift.

That was what Yseult had done for Allan's passion. But sensuality had not gone to sleep before dying. It was on the watch, ever more cruel. Would it prolong its vigil much longer? Would it resist the fatal agony many days? Yseult was waiting, chained to the patient, giving him her hand when he desired it, her mouth when he thirsted for it, her bosom when he willed it—all poisons, but too slow to suit her intrepid compassion.

Nevertheless, the sufferings had become so atrocious, that last night had been full of such new horror, that this pity of hers, reduced to inertia, rose up and tried to act. Oh, madness of senti-

ment! but a sentiment which would paralyse man's tongue if he tried to put a name to it!

"Perhaps," said she to herself, during one of those moments of inward retirement, which are so profound, and contain all the elements of secret reproach, "perhaps I have not been far enough yet? I have rejected every motive of vanity, stifled all the repugnance of vulgar delicacy, trampled on all seeming virtue, but does there not remain something else to sacrifice? Is there not a remnant of pride, setting up the negation that grieves him between Allan and myself?"

And thus she began to crush beneath her power of will this last flake of a soul of dust, this pride existing in wounds. Alas! this work upon herself, this apostasy of veracity which she had preserved till then, this blushing kiss offered to lies, this determination to be base, was not the result of one day's efforts. She had to try over and over again before being entirely degraded in her own sight.

Whether it was the effect of the combat she had with her pride, or the beginning of the attempt she was making, her manner suddenly changed, and Allan was promptly obliged to take notice of it. The infinite calmness of her bearing,

so great that it seemed to overflow, and which had many a time overcome Allan as if with a sudden chill, began to change a little. Her glance was deadened like polished steel beneath a long breath; the smile, a poor rose that had died leaf by leaf, hovered more sadly on the lips. Her voice, already stifled, grew more dull. When Allan spoke of his indefatigable love, she listened to him with an expression of her physiognomy that he had never seen. On the other hand, she abandoned herself less to long conversations alone with him, to a life with every minute passed in his company. Did not Brutus himself sometimes carry a corner of his toga to his mouth to hide the laugh of scorn that perhaps returned through his magnificent imposture, and which would have betrayed will and genius beneath the mask of stupidity?

Allan was astonished at this change in the woman who always behaved so simply and so loyally. What he had understood of her up to now had, it is true, made him the most unhappy of men, but at least released him from all future anxieties. Now, on the contrary, that Yseult no longer showed herself to be the unalterable woman she always was with him, should he be forced to

think that her compassion was the cause of a change, quite ordinary in any other woman, but inexplicable in her case? And why changed, if her sterile sentiment was always the same? What admixture could trouble the deep unity of her life? With Allan's activity, with the resources of a mind sharpened by what he feared, he soon explored the field of possibilities. But all led him to absurdity. All were in flagrant contradiction with what made Madame de Scudemor an exceptional creature. All veiled the truth about that woman, such humble and disinterested truth, that one must have been blind not to believe in it as one would believe in oneself, and it was thus that Allan believed.

One does not always judge a loved one well; and besides, what matters it? Is not illusion the most restful of all certainties? But not to be able to understand, either by illusion or reality, because thoughts spring up in our brain which we cannot reveal, ask the wives of men of genius what terrible grief that is! Allan experienced a feeling analogous to that suffering. He knew everything of the life and soul of Yseult. Nothing appeared outwardly or intimately to annoy him in this existence of which all the days were uniformly monotonous; nothing that could justify this difference of which

the suddenness struck him. He risked a question or two, but by a word or a pause she reduced the query to nothing. Between brother and sister, a thousand things are said; between lover and sweetheart, everything is said; but here, the relationship was not confidential, and what right had Allan to exact that all secrets should become common property? He did not really feel he had the right to say to Madame de Scudemor either tenderly or imperiously: "What is the matter with you?" He had thought over his actual life. The meditation to which he bent his spirit is the sign of deep feeling. This reflection exposes the ruggedness of the soul, the cracked, tottering, dusty boulders which in the life of two hearts fall at the least shock, and each day leave the rock more naked. Such a situation is full of anguish, but there is nothing to be done. One must judge and blush for oneself. We may tear out our eyes and throw them at the first milestone on our road, but we cannot tear out our conscience! Often shame is the cannon-ball dragged by the fettered, bloody foot of a feeling in our hearts. It was riveted to that of Allan.

But this feeling which carries its punishment with it, because all feeling perhaps contains some

unknown culpability, we still hold and cling to it; we press it to our breast and drive it in with both hands as fervently as a miser buries a treasure, with the thrill of a coward who is in hiding, and the tenacious madness of a young expiring woman who will not die. Unity alone is grand and beautiful, but duality devours men entirely, even to the heart. Oh, ye who place struggles above harmony, know ye of fights where one is conquered without the repose of defeat?

"It is baseness, immense baseness in me," said Allan to himself, when the truth pierced through his corrupted intellect, "to accept the life that this woman has mapped out for me! And besides, I obey much more than I command. I have sullied the luminous and candid conception that I had of love by my shameless longing, and although the satisfactions of my brutal egotism have always been powerless to satiate the cravings that I feel at the very source of my being, nevertheless ought I to have repudiated them? Love, then, is not a feeling of which a man ought to be proud, or else I am wanting in the most vulgar pride."

This frightful dilemma closed upon his conscience as the split oak-tree on the tired arms of Milo of Crotona; but even as the oak did not kill

the athlete, the wounded conscience complained, but love remained safe and sound.

This censure, which he did not spare himself, and which did not touch his passion, prevented him from giving way with Yseult to the inevitable abandonments of persons living together, and of which her coldness had considerably diminished the number. Are there not days when, in spite of all, one wants to strip off the cloak of the hidden life, of solitary thought, of unshared love, so as to breathe a little freer; when, although one has but one shoulder on which to lean the tired brow, one carries one's thoughts, more tired still, as if that shoulder could hear; when one fears not to expose the sweat of one's troubles to the cold, striking chill in the shadow of granite pedestals, as if it was the welcome coolness of a group of olive trees? What fatal imprudence, nearly always expiated too late! He did not know which was the most polluted, his pride or his love.

If he lived so retired within himself, it was all the more reason for him not to ask Madame de Scudemor to initiate him into the mysteries of her thoughts. He knew them. Nevertheless, he esteemed himself generous towards Yseult in never interrogating her any more—in never again solic-

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could he suppose about this unique woman? Everything, except that she could ever love him! Everything, sooner than that in the dried-up urn from which the rain-water had fled beneath the sky of love turned to bronze there could be found in some hidden angle, a drop not yet dry!

Worried, out of sorts with himself, wishing to finish with this curiosity which made him so anxious:

"Confess, Yseult," he said to her that day, with a laugh that was almost fierce, and in grave tones, "confess that you are tired of me, and that your pity weighs you down!"

She was seated at the piano, in a study exclusively reserved for her, simply and elegantly furnished, and which opened on to a balcony. She had just been trying a *fantasia*. Madame de Scudemor was no musician. The soul was wanting to these clever fingers. Thus she never finished the piece she had begun. She generally rose from the piano as if closing a book that is not interesting. But that day, in her lazy way of remaining where she was, her hands thrown loosely on the keys, all the unaccustomed style of which Allan was greedily seeking the cause was to be seen. The *fantasia* had passed from the soul of the musician into

hers. At unequal intervals she mingled some careless sound to the notes of the interrupted theme, breaking off to take up the melody once more, beginning over again to languidly disjoin the series of ideas that the music sought to depict. These resembled some wandering clematis of reveries that art had capriciously formed into garlands; cascades of ephemeral harmony, and melodies falling one by one in silence like drops of water from lifted oars, when the boat stops, on the long and sonorous tranquillity of the sea at eventide.

"Oh, Allan! have I ever complained?" she replied, with a feeling of injustice.

"Yes; for it is to complain not to be as you were," rejoined Allan. "You change, Yseult, and why should sadness seize you, if you were not absolutely discouraged by my love?"

She did not answer. She seemed evidently embarrassed. Her long eyelashes were cast down; her bosom rose and fell quickly. The camelias of the balcony, of which the window was open, resembled dying desires. She passed under the breath of her nostrils the extremity of her fingers, impregnated with a vague odour of amber by the contact of her hair, of which she often pensively smoothed the shining bands on her temples.

"Ah, you are right, Yseult!" continued Allan, dryly, with revolting ingratitude; "and how right you were when you said that your soul was dead! The pity you were unable to fight against, the pity you were astonished to still find in yourself, was only momentary exaltation, driving you to sacrifices which you now repent. Come now, confess! Tell me that I tire you with my transports, my grievances, my exactions! Tell me that I have become insupportable, and that you finish by hating me!"

"I shall not say so," she replied, in a low voice, "for such is not the case."

"Well, then, what ails you, Yseult?" he rejoined, with an agile, ardent, indefatigable tone of prayer, and the eloquent look, bathed in sparkling hope, preceding the "At last I shall get to know!" which is the expression of the egotistical and hostile movement that frequently sways us against the being we love the most!

"Allan," she said, sighing, and after a pause, "if I was mistaken in myself? If I had——"

"Ah, did I not tell you, madame," interrupted he, with an outburst of irony, "that you were mistaken? You have not been able to see that of my love and your pity, the former would hold out the

longest. You did not foresee the hellish life you had mapped out for yourself, and that my insensate passion accepted, as you had granted it, with closed eyes. For I feel full well, Yseult, that this life is frightful! more frightful than that of a young girl believing in happiness with all the strength of her soul, and victim of her marriage with an old man. And if I have not the courage to free you, Yseult, it is because I love you like a coward, and the Irrevocable weighs me down!"

"No, you have not understood me!" she retorted, still more deeply touched. "If I said I was mistaken in myself, I meant to speak of another error."

He looked aghast at her.

The curtains were drawn, and the room was very dark. Light and darkness struggled therein, one conquering the other, in certain parts and angles, like truth and falsity, candour and perfidy in a woman's soul. But it was a rosy obscurity, on account of the reflection through the closed curtains. This carmine tint giving to the palest or coldest persons the appearance of emotion, was additional coquetry or treachery. The piano was placed close to the tricky curtains, and the light only came from the balcony casement, to which Madame de Scudemor's back was turned.

"Oh, yes," she went on, after a longer pause than the first, and in such soft tones that it seemed as if it was a voice rising, phœnix-like, from the ashes of her other voice. "Oh, yes, I feel I was mistaken. I feel that a woman, when she believes that she has gained with difficulty the right to affirm her error, should not say so herself."

Allan understood no more than before. He hung breathless to her lips, whence came words which as yet had no sense. He waited for a spark of light. Yseult had slowly darted a long glance from under her deep lids, as far as the astonished face of the youth, and confusedly she dropped her eyes directly after. She was no longer the calm being, with a desert brow, and an icy smile on her lips. A troubled woman could be seen appearing through her tranquil majesty. The forehead-wilderness was filled with unknown, vague thoughts, and her mouth was shaded over with melancholy. Christ on His Tabor was not more suddenly transfigured.

"I, more than any other woman," she continued, "have I not answered for myself? Did I not affront dangers that I no longer feared? And yet——"

"And yet?" said Allan, with more devouring

curiosity than ever, and dazzled by the sight of a strip of clear sky.

"And yet," she rejoined, hiding her head in her hands, "we are never quits with love."

And in this movement of a young girl ashamed and betrayed, in the breaking of a dying voice, the identity of Yseult de Scudemor was lost. There only remained a woman who in trembling had begun a confession.

A cloud came over Allan's eyes, and in a weak voice, oppressed by the last words of Madame de Scudemor, he said:

"Do not play with me! For pity's sake, do not mock me! This is impossible! I do not believe you!"

Her only answer was to lower her hands. Her face was purple. It was impossible to tell if a tear of tenderness or the moisture of desire drowned her eyes. They were still downcast, like those of virgins who know, more divine than those who are ignorant. She rose, staggering, supporting herself by an angle of the piano, and came and sat on her young lover's knees with almost dying languor.

"Dost thou believe it now?" she said to him, plunging her eyes, softened like her voice, into his.

But Allan's look still showed doubt. She could not support his glance, and as if to avoid it, she placed her head on the young man's breast, heaving beneath the bounds of his heart.

"You love me! You!" repeated Allan. "But I am mad, or you are! You love me! after having so tortured me in loving me not!"

"Oh, pardon me that, Allan!" she murmured, her head still on his breast. "Pardon me for having been true with you! Alas, I could not guess that later you would have had your revenge had you chosen!"

"Ah! I only wish to be happy, my Yseult!" said he, carried away by the power of these last words, and he imprinted a kiss between the breasts of Madame de Scudemor, and that also was for the first time.

"You thought I was very proud, did you not?" she went on, with a most delightful smile. "And it was true, Allan, I was! But I wish to be humble now. My pride arose because I was unhappy; I thought I was inaccessible to the grief experienced in former days. My humility came from that love which I denied inwardly before confessing it to you. It is not long since I have discovered it in my soul, and if you, unwittingly

ungrateful, had not calumniated the sadness of which you were the cause, perhaps I should never have yielded up my secret to you. I feared lest you should not believe me. Still, I knew that I would make you have faith in me. But all this is not quite certain. See! I knew not what I wanted, and I know not what I say."

In her wild excitement she threw her arms about his neck, and she was lovingly fond with all her passionate talk. Allan had tears in his eyes. His was a rich nature, and his heart was full of the inexhaustible treasure of the tears of youth which he let escape and flow in joy as in grief. He was of that happy age when we have these good sobs for everything, and they prevent us from choking.

"What! you weep?" she exclaimed, in fright.

"Oh, fear not!" he answered. "'Tis for the happiness you bring me. I think I should have died had I not wept!"

"Weep, then, and weep for a long time, soul of my life, if you will only let me drink your tears!" And putting her face near Allan's, she took each burning tear between her lips. "This is so that they fall into my heart," she added, with loving coquetry which was not affected sentimentality.

O ye who have never seen it, you do not know

what inconceivable charm the sudden grace of an alluring passion gives to the woman who is no longer young. You do not know how the contrast between the heart that is found again and the lost beauty suits these poor beings whom God has not let time ravage too much. There is nothing in nature to which this ravishing anomaly can be compared. It is nothing wonderful if a brilliantly young woman borrows extra charm from love. But when not only the petals of the rose are fallen, but the leaves of the stem are dropping off as well, when all by which woman lives beautiful in mortal eyes expires, love seems more divine by that very reason. We are nearer to the presence of the soul, and as it has an immaterial way of revealing itself through the visible beauties of youth, attitudes, movements, lineaments, celestial expressions of a language unlearned but not forgotten, it rises up again, but better than ever, reduced to its purest symbols, solitary now, in the place of faded beauty, and where, greater and more tender, they disdain to weep over departed comeliness.

That day Yseult wrapped herself in ineffable sweetness. Never had Allan seen her in this adorable aspect. He had never dreamed of her thus, when he was happy with his thoughts, in the first

moments of his love. Such is the magic spell of sentiment inherent to woman, that gleam of youth returned to her brow, aurora borealis of life. And although Allan was the young man, and she the woman of declining years, one might say that this tardy love had effaced the distance that had so long separated them.

All that she knew of delicious things, all she could imagine of most passionate voluptuousness, she overwhelmed him with. If he had not loved her until then, she would have forced him to do so now. Look you, women know irresistible things! Hearken not to them; if you would not fall. Whether they love or not, one must believe and perish. When a child cannot sleep, they dandle it once or twice and set it slumbering. When a man opposes his virtue to them or tames them by his genius, lo and behold, they do with him as with the infant. The clever fairies watch over this sleep with mocking eyes, but it does not always last a hundred years; for perfidy may be as deep as it likes, it only requires a movement of the eyelids to reveal it.

If the language of Madame de Scudemor had belonged to that redoubtable science which all women have when they wish to make use of it, it

would have been its most subtle and refined manifestation; consummate artifice, if artifice it was. She never spoke a word to him without it being love more delicately expressed than if she had cried: "I love thee;" an ordeal by which many impostures are torn to pieces; rebellious words which must not be imprudently spoken, and which, in a lying mouth, burst like a spoilt gun in the hand. Caresses are more sure, and they bestow them with that modesty which is calculation masked by confusion; shame that inflames us; the trick of her who has no love, and who hides it by intoxicating the man who otherwise would finish up by seeing through it all.

"Come on the balcony, come, my Yseult!" said Allan to her, pressing her forward by the waist.

Exhausted nature asked for air. The woman's breath suffocated him, and he wished for a pure atmosphere so as afterwards to again suck in the stifling breath he had devoured until he swooned with pleasure. And then, when moral happiness kills us, we quickly fall back upon physical life, because at that juncture we do not wish to die of what is so delightful for us.

They went on the balcony together. He wanted to see her in the light, to better enjoy the naked-

ness of this love, with its thousand emotions dimly glanced at in the obscurity of the room. But in the open light of day the blushes were gone. Now was to be seen once more the pale and tranquil face of Yseult; her eye was not more moist than usual. But there was enough love left in her smile to bring consolation for the fact that there was none to be seen anywhere else.

They remained without speaking, standing up, leaning on the balustrade. Afar, the marshes were deserted; for it was Sunday, during vespers, an hour when the country is the least frequented, and all seems given into the custody of the holy day. A southern breeze made the grass and the water of the fen to quiver. All colours seen were as soft as the atmosphere, as deadened as the noises in the air. Have ye ever noticed those women full of undecided and tender languor whose eyes are without a sparkle, half-closed, and whose lips are ajar and smiling, from sensual pleasure felt or remembered? Such was nature that day. A muslin veil of white vapour clouded the sun, and becoming more and more gauzy in the other parts of the sky, toned down its deadened, pale turquoise blue. Allan revelled in his inward enthusiasm that did not overflow, although love had been poured into

his being in deep torrents. In the mirror of his soul, he looked at that other love which was smiling at himself. He was silent, as a man tasting the sweetness of fruit, lost in ecstatic beatitude. She glanced at him from beneath her vigilant eyelids, like a god enjoying the felicity of one of his elected.

"Yseult, tell me then that you love me, to let me know that I am not dreaming!" he murmured, awaking from his adoration.

"Do you not know it?" she answered him. "Is not to-day the ransom of all the sufferings endured by you, and the commencement of a new life for both of us?"

"Yes, but speak not thus!" he rejoined, with persistence that resembled a fatality. "You have not yet said it to me. Say to me 'I love you!' And then, whether I live or die, I shall not have dreamt it, I shall have made no mistake; I shall have heard it really, distinctly, from the lips I adore! Only say 'I love you!' Will you?"

A change came over Yseult's features, but did not remain. Did her conscience fear the ordeal, or had love, whose developments are so often unexpected, caught her in its toils again? Her smile became sweeter than ever, and in troubled tones,

guard against myself that I calculated all my caresses. If I dropped my eyes, it was because in vain I sought to call down my tears, and I was careful to warm my lips in yours, so that you should not recognise them! Any foolish female, playing the caressing cat on her sofa, has only to infuse a little affectation in her voice, and she inundates a loving heart with happiness through the impudent mockery of her words. What then am I, not to have done what is so often carried out by unskilful effrontery?"

The calmness that always mastered her, but which at that moment had such a superhuman and striking physiognomy, fell upon Allan's rage like a piece of ice on a heart dilated by aneurism.

"You insult me once more, and in a more outrageous fashion than before!" she rejoined, with lofty sadness. "This is what I have reaped for having lowered myself as far as the baseness of dissimulation, while other women have men at their feet and crowns of glory on their heads for reward of their egotistical impostures. And it is not this which humiliates me," she added, pointing to the impure spittle, beneath which her brow shone out with more radiance for souls who could understand her, than if a diamond star had been

placed upon it. "And I would not weep any more out of pride than out of love if I had still tears to shed! But I feel here," and she placed her hand on her bosom, "the impotency, the radical impotency which is in me, and the abortion of my last sacrifice."

And this last anguish, accepted without horror or disgust, made her seem greater than she had ever appeared to Allan, and it was this grandeur that killed his rage. He felt worse than remorse in his soul, a smarting shame of the insulting fit of passion of which he had been guilty. He did not weep, he did not fall on his knees before Yseult, he did not ask her pardon with his forehead on the stones; for an inward voice whispered that the effront was irreparable. He remained with his eyes cast down in the dust—as was his soul—beneath the weight of horrible and unspeakable confusion.

"You have not been shrewd enough yet, Allan!" she went on; "you saw that there was a mask, but you did not see what was hidden beneath it." And as she suspected the torture that the consciousness of his cowardly and ferocious act inflicted upon his originally generous heart: "Your insult," she added, with a divine attempt to reconcile him

with himself, "was it not a mistake, some error, and not meant for me?"

And with the floating end of her scarf she was about to sweep from her forehead the ignoble vestige of Allan's fury, but he caught her arm and stopped her.

"Leave it there still!" he said in a hoarse, quivering voice. "Let it be there, so that the shame of seeing it may choke me, and thus I may expiate my crime towards you."

"That would be too much like revenge," said she.

And she concluded the movement that Allan had interrupted. There exists kindness above all the mercy of pardon, but it prevents all the absolution of repentance. The relenting tears of Allan at this trait of celestial charity did not make him innocent in his own sight.

Out of admirable delicacy, which chosen souls and those beings who understand the exquisite misery of our hearts will alone appreciate, she left him alone on the balcony. She went back and sat at the piano, at the end of the room. She whose grief did not respect her lassitude was defeated that day, as if it was her first step in suffering—her first shock against that which breaks, the first tear of the eternal weeping of life!

Alas! as she had told Allan, she felt she could do nothing, not even dissimulate, without the demon of her destiny appearing to give the lie to her efforts of dissembling and craftiness. It was because she did not love Allan, and she had not been able to trick him by the outward appearances of love; it was because, feeble creature, despite the energy of her will and her womanly fascination, she had not been able to identify herself with a part of which the humiliation had counted for nothing in the presence of the hope of success; it was because Pity, that she had always obeyed, still remained to her, but without a resource—Pity which had tried everything, and with which all had failed, falling back upon her this last time, but whom this slip to the bottom of the precipice of despair wounded a little more, but did not cause to die!

XXII.

Madame de Scudemor had returned to her state of impassibility, but it was accentuated by more than usually disdainful sadness. Her life and that of Allan had returned to the groove in which they moved, distinct and reunited. But for these two existences, one welded to the other without ever mingling, there were only two bitter oceans and no sweet Arethusa! Since she had failed to realise her beautiful Machiavellian poem, which was the last attempt of her inconsolable pity, she was quite resigned—if this inward resolution of arid and irrevocable, but almost impossible, reality can be called by the slightly religious name of resignation.

At present Allan loved her with the feeling of all the wrong he had done her. He no longer thought he had the right to make a single complaint. As if to absolve himself in his own eyes, he accepted the misfortune which unceasingly stabbed him to the heart. "It is no use suffering a little," some one has said. At first pain irritates, then it hardens one; but by dint of suffering we

get better. The pineapple only ripens beneath a corroding sun, and the orange would remain acid if the weather was always fine. What has been, perhaps, much less noticed is that nothing in a loyal and noble nature brings one nearer to perfection than some wrong one has done. Those who have never fallen, owing no reparation to themselves nor to others, do not hasten to do good so quickly as those who have once strayed. Allan was a better man since he had been so guilty, and the sentiment of his inward reproach was a purification of his love.

He often spoke to her about it, and with what he said he mingled a demand for pardon, which was always granted. Now no longer did his love forget respect during the familiarities of sensuality. The man, remade but unchanged, no more dared to proffer a caress. Once the possessor, he had become a lover; master, he was now a slave—although she was no more queen than before. At night the doors were closed; not a step was heard in the corridors. And the act of marriage, which is an indecency when it is not holy, no longer proved their *mésalliance*. Would this state of things last long? Is it true that a man lives better with his desires when they are not appeased?

Would Allan see his love eaten away by repentance as by a long and slow malady? And what would go under in the struggle, passion or remorse? When dangerous sensuality is acclimatised in us, it lasts till we die; and to the utter confusion of human nature, remorse—vigorous, tenacious, and young, when we think it old and worn-out—dies first by the habit of this inveterate passion, as if in the viscous embrace of a polypus.

Yseult knew this. That eagle eye in her heart had pierced Allan's repentance. She had gauged it; and if it had not shown some grief, she would have doubtless scorned it. But however noble she may have been, she was a woman; and because she was a woman, her bowels still yearned. So that when, at this phase of his love, Allan showed himself in a more disinterested aspect, the charitable woman gulped down her rising scorn, and only had sweet and sad words for Allan's enthusiasm, the play of a child at which one laughs, when one can no more weep over it.

"Yseult," he sometimes said to her, "I know not now what I am for you! I admire you more, but I adore you none the less. You had reached the steepest part of your Calvary when you felt the emptiness of your last sacrifice, when you saw

yourself abandoned, not only by God but by yourself, and that your will died stricken during a sublime attempt, turned against with brutal insult to boot, added thereto by me. Oh, Yseult! it must have cost you much, you whom society had never bent under its hypocritical laws, and who had remained sincere; it must have cost you much to strip yourself of your pride, preserved as a treasure for the last days of your life—immense poverty with death at its end! But is it not that, Yseult, which makes you more noble in my eyes than if you had remained sincere?"

She did not answer, but she thought that Allan's admiration would not take the place of that which she had lost for him. She could not prevent herself blushing inwardly at this pollution more than at all the others; for to have remained sincere is better than not to have ceased to be chaste. At least, she had the fortitude of this opinion.

"And my admiration for you," continued the worthy young fellow, "has taught me to seek only in my love for love itself, and not for happiness, which I must renounce. I love you to be able to love you, and not to be happy! Love like mine seeks no exchange. It has no need of it. Or if it does, this one-sided bargain cannot extinguish it."

And the last words of Allan are the omega of man's love. The disowned and cursed powerlessness of sensuality to escape from itself is a shameful or glorious attempt of mysticism—when it is not religious. But this despairing retreat of passion, this abdication of love, which, alas! is only inconsistent with love's very nature, did not deceive Yseult. At these purified promises, these noble words of the man who loved her enough not to ask her anything more in the name of a love that was sufficient unto itself, she shook her head, and replied with an incredulous "Do you think so?" falling lazily and almost absently from the lips to crush the listener; for that is often the sole superiority of him who knows over him who believes, with compassion for some weak illusion that one has not the courage to destroy. In her heart she hid the conviction that pure love was a bitter illusion, incomprehensible to the intelligence, not to be realised by the feelings. Perhaps had she also formerly tried to strengthen the lassitude of her soul with this idea, rendered a great one by the despair of unhappiness, but which is not within the reach of man's hand in reality, and she may very likely have recalled her old mistake when she perceived all these pretensions to strength simply

concealed frightful weakness? Human nature wears itself out as much by sacrifice as by enjoyment, and when one is devoted out of sensibility, the most beautiful devotion breaks down on the road. But—most cruel!—while yet possible, devotion is no longer believed to be efficacious.

The journey to Italy was decided. They were to depart at the advent of the first cold weather. The kingfishers of the marsh had taken flight; and the leaves, that fall later in Normandy than anywhere else, began to drop from the pale branches of the willow trees. A few days more, and there would be nobody left in the deserted Château.

The last moments they passed there were marked by nothing new in their habits. Allan, whose love, as it increased in ardour, had gone through so many modifications, still had eyes for no one but Madame de Scudemor. Camilla showed no resentment for the neglect of her young comrade of childhood; she was serious to the degree of appearing as if she did not want to be resigned. As for Yseult, she contrasted with these two young faces, to one of which pain gave its expression—heart-rending or downcast—while from the other the careless joy of girlhood slowly died away like pure and fresh water flowing from the dried-up foun-

tain of our gardens at the approach of summer-time. Thus, placed between what was cloud and tempest, growing trouble and consuming passion, Madame de Scudemor resembled by her calm grandeur the lines of the vast and morose Roman horizons of the country she was about to visit.

With what feelings did these three people see the moment approaching when they would leave the Willows? For Madame de Scudemor, this voyage and the departure was only an ordinary accident. Pilgrim in the world as in life, she knew Italy, where she had passed many years, too well to take the least interest in this trip. Although she was not born there, nevertheless her first sensations had made it her mother-country; but she had never known that sweet love of one's native land that survives every hope and all lost happiness, in more tender hearts than hers. She had only inhabited her heart. Do you accuse her of being too hard? Know ye not that the love of which she deprived herself is made up of what is most fresh in the first impressions of life, and most distant in our memories? If the cold wind of life has blown ever so lightly, away go all these pastel sketches! From her disposition all poetry has faded; her soul turned from all things, the world was no

longer a marvellous alphabet for her. She did not ask over what blooming heather or across what hills the air she breathed had come. Dreamy questions of youth, she had forgotten them all! The charming beauties of Nature scattered all over the universe surrounding us existed no more for that woman than Allan's beauty itself, to which she never accorded the caressing look of momentary contemplation. Blind with strange cecity that demanded no light, she would have required some new decree of the Almighty to reopen the lost world. Allan had to learn this later, although she had warned him already of his misery; he who, on the mountain top or on the sea with her, in the midst of sunny days of Italy and nights in Venice, never found again in his bronze statue of a woman a fragment of a chord, a sound torn from the æolian harp that poets have in their breast, and which, when all its chords are sweet, gives out resounding notes as vast and pure as the air that makes them vibrate. He had yet to learn that wherever he might carry unhappy Yseult to make her live one minute of his life of emotions, tears, and hymns, Nature could no more warm that creature of cold ashes than could his love, and that he would be like the son of Achilles dragging the

virgin of Troy by the hair to the paternal tomb. Alas! he was more unfortunate still; for the antique warrior could strike as much as he liked at the naked bosom with the hilt of his sword, the future never spoke, and silence at least avenged the priestess; but as for Allan, what breast did he then assault and outrage, while nothing answered his cries?

Lost in the incidents of the moment, Allan could not think that Italy would make him forget his painful preoccupation. He believed in the duration of his love as in its intensity. He had never loved but Madame de Scudemore; he had that faith that all first love has in itself. If he did not die of his wound, he would keep it a long while and suffer from it. If it had not been for his love, the projected journey would have been for him the occasion of a thousand dreams and pleasures. Who could be poetical without thinking of Italy? One must fatally love that country, since, hackneyed and vulgar though it may be, no distinguished being can keep from doing so. But Allan could not suspect that in the beauty of the sky there was a balm for heart-sickness. He had told the truth to Madame de Scudemor. She had so wonderfully absorbed him in her that nothing of

his life or of his thoughts could pass beyond the limits of this woman, who had become all the world for him.

So he thought; and in this he was mistaken, as he was in many things. Love is more intelligent than stupid. It does not always pass the sponge over the world and efface it like an unfinished sketch. Often it works the contrary miracle; and Cupid decorates the universe with the light of his joys or the shadow of all his sadness. Without love, Nature would be like a vast expanse of water without a sky above. If the loved woman—splendid microcosm—swallows everything up in her mortal bosom, it is to make us greater and more beautiful. She idealises creation, the powerful and grand study that God has given us to finish. We only retire into ourselves, letting nothing of the outer world reach us, when love exists for us no more—or when we have arrived, like Madame de Scudemor, not merely at the end of the feeling of love, but when the faculty by which we love is lost. The whole of the time that this faculty is not exhausted, love is more like a living interpretation of the dead language of the world than its erasure. Ought not the last stroll of Allan in the little copse of the Willows have proved that to him?

It was in the evening—and yet it was but four o'clock—an autumnal evening, cold and damp. The remaining leaves on the trees of the miniature forest were yellow, and the sun, yellow too, was setting in a washed-out, colourless sky. The winding paths were filled up with the withered foliage that had fallen during the first autumn rains. No longer was any bird to be heard, and the syringa blossoms, with their cloying perfume, were dead. Allan walked alone under the trees. Instinctively, he had gone there once more before leaving the Willows, perhaps for a very long time, towards the copse where she had told him her story, and where he had begun to know this great woman, unknown to society, and whom he had loved in such great fear. Of that fearful night which had driven him mad and nearly caused his death, what remained now in the leafless wood? Naught of its mystery and its perfumes. No more did the nightingale sing in the distance, and all was gone, except this grievous love that had not passed away as quickly. He walked along the paths with a sensation of unspeakable melancholy, as if this place, consecrated by the memory of a cruel night, brought him an impression of sadness he was powerless to surmount. When he reached the rustic

bench on which Yseult had sat and made him sit beside her, he fell into deep meditation. He asked himself how much more sad, when he was gone, would this empty spot be in his thoughts, as no one would come and sit there.

With regretful superstition, he went as far as to take from the side of the alley a handful of wet and withered leaves, and with almost religious recollection placed them in his breast, which was burning enough to dry them. Then he left the copse, driven forth by a voice he heard.

Camilla could not be far off, and in fact he found her on the terrace which formed the termination of the copse. The departure for Italy made her more happy than he, although her joy had not the noisy and exalted character of former days. She was seated on the breast-high wall of the terrace, her head bare to the sharp atmosphere of the autumn evening breezes, leaning against an empty granite vase where water remained from the rain, and where a passing bird sometimes stopped to drink. From thence, she looked out over the outstretching marsh where the pools were already larger beneath the action of the first rains of the season. Her simple grey frock, her flying locks, her leaning, pensive attitude, caused her

to stand out harmoniously on the background of the cloudless horizon of such limpid, undecided tints. Allan, seeing her thus, approached the wall, and followed the direction of the young girl's eyes. They were fixed upon a stray sea-gull returning to sea, for the coast was not far off.

"Look you!" she said, pointing to the bird, and as if continuing her chain of thought aloud, "It can be in Italy to-night if it chooses."

"You seem to be very much preoccupied about Italy," said Allan; "and will you, then, be so glad to leave here?"

"Oh, yes!" she answered, with charming naïveté. "You don't know how bored I am here now!"

The expression with which that was said was painful, hinting at the betrayal of hidden suffering. Allan had never known her to have such a poignant expression of tenderness. And under the impression she caused:

"Why are you bored?" he rejoined, with a note of compassion in his voice.

"Why? Oh, why?" she repeated, with downcast eyes.

It could be seen that she was relieved by the unaccustomed question of Allan, but she did not dare

answer it. If indifferent Allan had insisted a little more, perhaps what she had in her poor heart would have escaped her efforts to keep it there. But at her second "Why?" Allan was already away, having caught sight of Madame de Scudemor at the end of the terrace. The child he left behind him forgot the white bird that was fading away in the west, and leant her forehead against the empty granite vase. And if a tear fell from so much neglect it was hidden from the open light of heaven.

flowing Douve, and a few scattered and intrepid sportsmen after snipe and wild duck, and these men plunge stoically into the water up to their loins in order to get their long fowling-pieces within near range of their game. Except these two kinds of people, there is no other human being in the flooded deserts, and if there is still another living thing, it is sometimes a silent heron, standing upright, dreaming in his isolated tuft of rushes, or some large fish migrating with difficulty to the sea. The cattle, the brindled life of the marshes, are nearly all in their stalls. Their lowing is no longer heard breaking silence through space. To this bellowing has succeeded the sinister and redoubled cry of the crows, croaking unseen from behind the clouds, or in the thick fog. The water, sweating out of the soil and traitorously accumulating without seeming motion, is no longer blue and sparkling beneath an opaque sky, grey all over, sometimes darkening into blackness, foreshadowing showers. The liquid element no longer forms the thousand little lakes, with their changing facets like the mirror of the summer. All is changed into a vast sheet of water, of mournful aspect that chills one, and drowns the heart and imagination like a sad disaster—as if

an inundation had brought its liquid burial to a close over the whole surface of the country, leaving nothing to be saved.

They had returned from Italy to see this terrible winter landscape. After a sojourn of two years in the land of the sun, they once more found themselves in their rainy Château of the Willows. It was then December, and by the fireside, in one of the pavilions facing the fen, were Madame de Scudemor, Camilla, and Allan de Cynthry. They were in an oval-shaped drawing-room—a family apartment of domestic and meditative life, arranged with great simplicity of taste. Although the cold was not much felt in this well-closed room, the flooring covered with a thick carpet, a big fire was burning in the chimney. It was not the gay and clear flame of logs from the apple-trees, but the sharp, slow crackling of oak. It gives a dull fire, with embers and little glare, and its incessant, worrying sputter joined in the chorus with the noise of the hasty small raindrops on the window-panes.

Such were the only sounds heard within this room and without. Madame de Scudemor, her daughter, and Allan, said nothing to each other, either because they were given up to some devour-

ing inward thought, or else because this December morning had made them suffer from a fit of sadness which had no other motive than the weather, as if the best motive of melancholy was not because we are human beings. The light, thanks to the whiteness of the ceiling and the window-curtains, was greater in the drawing-room than out of doors, where it came from a low and dirty sky, surrounded by the vapours of rain on the horizon that could be viewed from the window.

Was it through having dwelt two years in Italy, or the fatigue of travelling, that had injured the health of the Countess de Scudemor? Be that as it may, she was visibly ill. The doctor had ordered her to take much rest. The late hours of Paris were bad for her. In answer to the prayer of Camilla and Allan, she had at last made up her mind to wait for the advent of spring at the Willows. These two years of absence had weighed heavily on her. The sun half plunged in the sea was entirely swallowed up. Italy had devoured everything.

This dull light suited her dull brow, on which, as formerly with the gesture we have noted in her, she smoothed with her hands her bands of hair, now invaded by cruel grey. Half reclining on a

causeuse, she gazed absently, like a sick and unoccupied person, at the fire in the grate. Her figure had lost its imposing bearing, and although its trace was indelible, her attitude was humble and shrinking. Does not an eagle mortally wounded hang its wings like a dove? A loose gown of brown silk enveloped her in long folds, and the statue under the glistening stuff, which seemed glued to the figure, still showed such energetic curves that one might easily have forgotten that clay had taken the place of marble.

Allan was standing near the mantelpiece, his back turned to the chimney-glass. He was no longer the Allan of bygone days, with the beauty of the androgynæ. The enchanted dream had fled. He had lost his feminine lines and his Aurora-like cheek. He was no longer the celestial, wingless seraph who caused both sexes to weave strange fancies. He was a man, less handsome by reason of virility and colour, but more comely in moral beauty. The soul had worn out its fleshy sheath, and the blade shone through it. Superficial men call that "getting old." He was extremely sunburnt, and his closely shaven beard gave a bluish tint to his chin, which otherwise would have had too much of a youth's voluptuous weakness. The

trace of his long suffering was marked in the depression of the corners of the eyes. How much time is wanted for the drop of water, always falling on the same spot, to bore a hole in the granite rock? How long for a patient tear to incrust its furrow on our faces? His Byronic brow, which he owed to his mother's enthusiasm, beneath his brilliant, curling, juvenile locks, was aged as by eighty years of morose thoughts and precocious grief; his genial and grand forehead was as mighty as that of a bust of Sophocles, but without the laurels. It was only crowned with those early wrinkles, chevrons of life carried on high that they may be better seen, the only wreath that accompanies our premature baldness, in our Cæsar-like fatuity. Everywhere but above the eyebrows, he breathed youth; full, supple and well-formed; that youth which makes us a demi-god, because we are only half-men.

As absent-minded as Madame de Scudemor, his eyes were vaguely turned towards Camilla, who, at one of the windows in front of him, was working at some embroidery. She was now what women in their singular language of pudicity and indecency call "quite formed." Her face, of dull red, almost black, so much had she, like Allan, been

caught by the Italian sun, went well with the dead-leaf shade of the hangings of the *salon;* but the curves of the bent brow and the ideal lines of the neck, losing itself beneath a modest cape, and starting again at the bodice, to be lost once more in the loose frock, were only to be seen like a bath of half the body in the thick or light garments of the sirens of the gardens of Armida.

Such were the changes that could be remarked in these three persons. Placed in life at the ages of transition, when the declivities are more rapid, and paths more winding, there were naturally always spaces between them; but at present as all three had advanced into the spiral of the mountain, arid peaks separated Allan from Madame de Scudemor, while between Allan and Camilla there were only a few hills, easy to climb.

There may have been some secret embarrassment in their prolonged silence, which one is sometimes happy to break by an indifferent or vulgar reflection; or in his thoughts, or on the retina, may have remained some splendour of Italy—sparkling foam not yet dried on the shores of memory; and this image—like a flask of precious essence, substantial remains of all the roses of Trebizond, which, when breathed, throws one into the mortal longing for

the country one has left—became painful for him, instead of being sweet, as it ought to have been, by the effect of the contrast with rainy and cloudy Normandy.

"What a difference," said Allan, "between this part of the world and the land we have just left!"

"Yes, indeed!" replied Camilla, whose voice was no longer celestially musical, as in the olden days; for there is, as it were, a rosebud in the voice which puberty alters. "Since our return, I am like you, Allan; I can feel the difference better. There is such life in Italy. The luxury of existence there takes your breath away. From afar, we can judge it better. Italy is only truly beautiful upon reflection."

"Do you know that what you are saying there while you thread your needle," retorted Allan, "is almost profound, my pretty thinker?"

"Oh, I don't think, Mr. Mocker!" said she, with charming liveliness. "When my soul seems impressed, I say so. That is all!"

And if she who said that was not the most naïve of all young ladies, she must have been the most hypocritical. Who has not shuddered while thinking what being natural may hide?

"Do you remember," she added, suddenly look-

ing at him, "our long cruises at Venice, on the sea all red, in the evening? And at Florence, near the Arno, where you so often read Petrarch to us? We did not think then that the days which seemed so fine to us would appear still more beautiful the following winter at the Willows."

"That is the effect of remembrance," said Allan.

"All memories do not shine out like that!" murmured Madame de Scudemor, who had held her tongue till then. And as if she repented of what she had said, which resembled a complaint:

"Do you remember, also, Allan," she continued, with an undefinable look, and changing her position on her *causeuse,* "that you showed very little eagerness to see Italy when we left? With what scorn did you not speak of it! I warred with you for that. I could not conceive that imagination like yours was not quickened by the perspective of a journey in that beautiful land. Confess that since then you have expiated your preconceived ideas of disdain, and that you have loved that country for the sake of all the love that you imprudently refused to bestow on it?"

These words, spoken with an accent of apparent gaiety, concealed an intention of which Camilla did not know the secret, but which did not escape

Allan. He did not answer; he had turned half round, and was tormenting one of the andirons with his boot.

"And that made me very joyous, friend," the Countess went on. "I fully enjoyed your enthusiasm, although I did not always share it, which sometimes vexed you. That was like society into which you let yourself be dragged with regret, but which soon after we could not get you away from. The hermit almost became a dandy. My dreaming savage! do you think you can tell me how many quadrilles you danced at the Naples Embassy?"

In this sweet gaiety there were trumpets playing —a blast for the echoes of Allan's heart; sounds of long-awaited victory, being a defeat for him, at which he was inwardly humiliated.

"Eh, mon Dieu!" she continued, "one would think, boy, that you are ashamed of liking society, as if you were not twenty! Be as fond of it as you choose, especially as you will not always love it. Listen to me!" she added, leaning towards him, and taking his hand to make him sit on the *causeuse;* "I want you to say that I am very amiable to-day."

And she smiled with rather coquettish but ador-

able grace. The elegant simplicity of her manner was irresistible. Camilla lifted her head and forgot her embroidery, smiling also, impressed by the charm of her mother at certain moments. It was an admirable thing to see those two smiles face to face—one juvenile, of purple and mother-o'-pearl, and the other, alas! only conventional, accompanying some apt remark.

"If you are generous enough, friend," she rejoined, "to bury yourself for an immense long winter at the Willows, I am too much so to accept such sacrifice. I will not exile you from Paris and its gaieties. Return there! I permit it; I pray you to do so; I even wish it. Go back to Paris, and return in the spring and tell us all about your pleasures."

"I thank you," said Allan, visibly embarrassed; "but I have a great desire to prove to you that I do not love society as much as you suppose. Anyhow, I do not seek its amusements; my place is here and nowhere else. You are ill. It is he to whom you have stood in lieu of a mother, and whom you saved from death in this house; it is I," he insisted, significantly, pressing the hand he held in his, "who ought to nurse you."

She tried to combat this resolution, but it was

indestructible, and all her efforts were useless, although Allan, because of Camilla being present, could not put forward as an objection a feeling that allowed no reply to be made. But why, if this feeling still existed, these allusions of the Countess to Italy, and to the love of society that Allan had shown there? Why express a wish to see him pass the winter in Paris? And if this was a continuance of the dissimulation which both were forced to observe, why was Allan so confused? Was it not allowable to think that the months just past hid some change much deeper than the exterior alteration seen in them? Years must be counted sooner in the soul than on the features. The ancients, to symbolise immortality, placed a butterfly with its wings open on a death's head. But the ingenious metaphor turns against the very idea it seeks to express; for the butterfly could very well signify the vanished years, and the skull the human soul, which, at least by its feelings, is not immortal, and on which the butterfly—life—with open wings remains but too often, like the irony of fate.

II.

The Countess Yseult de Scudemor had been a prophetess. This sibyl of extinct sensuality had weighed the love of Allan in the balance of experience and human nature, that never betrays. Those two years had proved to her the legitimacy of her previsions.

During his sojourn in Italy, Allan (need we say it?) had returned to the life that his wrongs towards Madame de Scudemor had nobly interrupted. But the nobility of sensual souls never lasts long. Allan loved her still too much—do ye know what is first love?—not to feel athirst for the burning beverage which he had so largely drank. If he had found repugnance, an objection, a refusal, the thousandth part of the most flimsy pretext for denying him, perhaps he might have been thrown back upon himself; perhaps he might have once more considered the resolutions he abandoned, and have kept to them. Perhaps, all ashamed not to have reached the standard of the love that he had called the greatest because it was the purest,

might he have returned to his remorse, and lost it in respectful adoration. But Yseult did nothing to render such behaviour possible. She remained what she had always been: an odalisque who did not stoop to pick up the handkerchief thrown to her by the sultan, but who did not turn her head away.

When there is not a blade of grass to resist the rising sea, the shore is soon flooded. When a man feels that he has only to speak to have what he wants, he speaks; or else desire is dead in his soul. But if there is only a little longing, the idea that one can have one's will turns the brain. To resist, one must be a god, and then God, without the kindness and liberty which He has given to mankind, would mean indifference. It is frightful to think that we cannot conceive a desire of infinite power without supposing chaos, or rather without denying God Himself. Great Heaven! what can become of man when he desires and you send him power?

Allan was but another example of human weakness.

For him everything was a motive of infirmity, a pretext for a fall, a reason for becoming insatiable during this two years' journey with the loved

woman. We must recollect that she told him so one evening. On a voyage there are so many incidents, such negligence, so much that is unexpected which serves so well to hide us, when we understand things! Truly, there were traps set for Allan. There were indescribable days enlacing by new habits those even whom the old routine of intimacy had fatigued, and who were on the point of getting away from it. This brings about a renewal of feelings such as one believed to be no more possible, but what must these sensations be when they have never left us? In the most narrowed existence, when a couple are all in all to each other, they are not always side by side; the exterior mingles with the interior, distractions separate us. But on a journey nothing interrupts days passed, flank against flank, in the voluptuously irritating swing of the carriage, throwing you close together by all its undulations. You had never seen the woman thus under every kind of light, from daybreak to sunset, and night had never caught you unable to endure any longer all the emotions of twenty-four hours toppling one on top of the other. Then, if the voyage is a very long one, when one arrives at last, is there not a weight of desires that stifles, and which one is

forced to get rid of? And if one arrives in Italy —where, if we had none, sensuality comes and searches us out—in this country, as beautiful as womankind and cursed like her, do not the sleepy serpents lift up their heads to the sun that invalids bask in, and which, it is said, prevents their death?

But this phase of Allan's love was the last movement of ascension, after which he found but one easy curve to descend. There are feelings that die away suddenly, as if blasted by invisible lightning; unseen exhaustion then tames the man. There are other sensations which act on the nerves, and are slowly obliterated; that is when the man gives battle, which is lost from the moment that it wages against this phantom of vacant space and time, stronger than he. Allan's love belonged to the latter class. It would have been rather difficult to follow how it imperceptibly wasted away. Probably Allan himself only noticed it much later.

What was singular was that he felt more inclined to pardon Yseult for not sharing his love than for holding aloof from all his other enthusiasms. He did not know that there is a deep retreat in the human heart where, if one goes down as far, nothing more is heard of the music of the

world, nothing is seen of the light of heaven. He was not aware that grief works downwards, doing what genius performs up above, making all admiration impossible. Could he not see himself in this kind of rancour against Yseult regarding matters of art and thought, a sure sign of the weakening of his love? Did not that, in a way, excuse her for the animosity he had involuntarily felt so long on account of the sterility of her sympathy? Moreover, when passion is intense, do we perceive if the loved woman has any intellect? Rivarol loved silly women. That is the history of intelligence in love matters.

Whichever may have been the moment when Allan was able to judge the immense vacancy that fading love left in his soul (for who knows on what day the pillar of light fell from the brow of the woman who formed its base, and left the man in darkness alone with his disgusted imagination?), at any rate, secret shame prevented him from confessing it to himself; and when it was no longer possible for him to have any illusions about what he felt, he had not the courage to be sincere with Madame de Scudemor. Out of silly delicacy we think that we are forced—even inwardly—to keep the promises made with great as-

surance by love, at the time when it was ardent and robust. We will not give the lie to the eternity we formerly believed in. And although in Allan's position he had no heart to spare, yet he remained discoursing of love, but having none left. With his imagination so full of power, he tried to preserve some ideality by talking of a feeling that was really withering away, and he succeeded in cheating himself as well as Yseult. But on the morrow, she being absent, having gone out on horseback, as was her habit, exploring the country round to find fresh landscapes—at this moment, when the air seems to penetrate us, and the light is so radiant that our soul seems illuminated by it—he looked within himself with a steady eye, and saw, as clearly as beneath an Italian sun, that he loved her no more.

"Why, then," said he, "does she not guess this state of my feelings?"

And he did all he could to trick her; so that, had she told him the truth, he might perhaps have denied it; for such is our inconsistency. Divided between the shame of confessing the inanity of a feeling in which he placed all his pride, together with the desire not to be prodigal of its lying manifestations, he knew not which way to turn, and he

longed for some one else or for a hazard to dispense him from coming to a decision and acting upon it. He suffered from this weakness, which he could not conquer any more than if it had been some force to be feared. This is the state of a soul in which is mingled fatigue without repose, and hidden bitterness, fluctuating from pillar to post, and where our mind loses all steadiness and dignity, and we see it ourselves.

Then it was that he threw himself into the vortex of outdoor life, the sanctuary of impotency for all who are wretched through the thoughts or the heart. The natural beauties of the delirious land he was living in did not suffice him. He also went into society. He embraced this hollow world as if it was some friend who was saving him from himself. He seized it by all its ideas, by the waist of all its dancing-girls. Madame de Scudemor, who did not dare to believe too quickly in what she was impatiently hoping for, was very pleased to see that a distraction had rapidly captured the young man, and had led him away from the fixity of sensual passion. How many times had she sought around her with her lingering look among the crowd of ladies at these balls and parties to find a happy rival who would steal Allan's love

from her? As she found none, she had good reason to believe his deplorable love still lasted.

So nothing was changed in the habits of an existence that rendered them more free and more hidden since they were in Italy, by reason of their life not being continually under Camilla's eyes. Allan's position was not exactly that of those husbands without love who, to do their duties as men, require the warm feather-bed of the nuptial couch. He had not yet fallen so low. Allan was himself again under the influence of rapid illusions; he was aflame with his memories. The obsession that made him start and look at the hands of the clock in the *salons* where he passed part of his night did not follow him into Yseult's room. He put on his love, so to speak, at the threshold. But he also left it there the next day. The moment was not far off, no doubt, when he would find it there no more.

Not one of the thousand facets of abasement was wanting in this youth. He saw himself reflected in them all, and smiled to himself with horror. Like all that is young, he had dwelt in the regions of exaltation—virgin peaks, tinted with the starry light of the noble and devoted thoughts with which we enter upon life's journey. And now he came down into a low and fetid atmosphere, with

lungs used to the purest of skies. Where was the poetry of his love? Twenty times had it struck against vulgar realities; but that was but momentary pollution. Now love had fled. The naked truth alone remained. And it was no longer blind and burning passion that enchained him to this reality, but some more cowardly weakness still that he could not understand himself. He was always in pain, but no longer was there left to him the consolation of seeing himself suffer through the pride of hopeless love. No longer had he fits of generous anger against himself, or fearless instants when, like Cato of Utica, we tear, not our entrails, but our heart, having no fraternity for ourselves. Let this unworthy life subsist a little longer, and he would fall into entire degradation.

Just as they were about to leave Italy, an illness full of dejection that overcame Madame de Scudemor changed the connection existing between her and Allan. Perhaps also tardy discovery may have permeated Yseult's brain? She did not give it speech, but profited by her sufferings to put a stop to an intimacy which resembled marriage such as mankind has made it—by profaning it. Imperishable delicacy closed the lips of Allan to all questions. Between distinguished beings it is impos-

sible to discuss certain vulgar questions relating to the mysteries of conjugal cohabitation.

If noble misery interests you who read, you may continue this story. Such an illness occurred just in the nick of time for Allan de Cynthry. It relieved him of what he had not the strength to reject. It brought about what a confession for him ought to have done earlier if he had dared. On the other hand, the vanity of love, which is born when love itself expires, was not called into action. The unhappy man breathed again. He still had just as many reasons for despising himself, nevertheless his scorn decreased. Man has not sufficient courage to feel his abasement for any length of time. Some other pain nearly always makes that of scorn perceptible. When this sharp twinge is wanting, disdain loses the point of its borrowed dart, and slumbers in the wound it has made. Greater freedom of spirit made him once more kind. We are only affable when we are not sensual. All ardent natures who know how to love are far from being amiable; they trouble the lives of those around them much more than they make them pleasant. Amiability ought to be catalogued with the fine arts, with which it has a great analogy. In the place of the turbulent passion that he had

been pouring into the life of Madame de Scudemor, Allan encircled her with the most attentive care, and with kindness of every kind. It was a sort of silent worship. One might still have fancied there was a little love left; or some tenderness different to that of love.

Whatever may be the result of some great love on a man's disposition, whether crushing it or sullying it, it cannot be denied that, if the lover gets over it, his mind is improved in this uncomfortable class-room. The activity of the brain has been exercised, and doubled thereby. But the progress is not perceived until we are free of the absorption which has developed this faculty by a process of concentration. Allan soon had a proof of this truth. As he got away from a life of sentiment, he re-entered that of intellect, enriched with a mass of ideas that sentimentalism had given him. It is a solemn moment when a man again takes up his thinking task after having terminated that of suffering.

At the first fits of indisposition, Madame de Scudemor had a wish to return to France, and Allan and Camilla never thought of opposing her desire. Yet both of them dearly loved the land they were about to leave. Allan, who had lived

there in communion with his heart and conscience —double torture, eternal retaliation—liked Italy much less than did the young girl. Doubtless, her heart had greater leisure to look round and be enchanted with all that is beautiful, but in her adoration for this part of the world was there only that worship which in people of sublime devotion is the last degree of admiration? She had left the Willows in the belief that some misfortune would overtake her if she stopped there. Was it not in that house that she had lost the affection of Allan, whom she had always looked upon as a brother? In Italy, on the contrary, Allan was not rough, nor did he wound her in any way. That is easy to understand: once Allan's love for Madame de Scudemor extinguished, Camilla was no longer the innocent creature with whom he had passed his childhood. Another reason made him once more take the greatest interest in Camilla. The young girl, during her stay in Italy, had arrived at an age when the greatest madcaps become serious, forming a contrast between the freshness of the lively dawn of youth and the charming gravity which makes girls themselves stop smiling. It is as if God had placed a thought in a rose, instead of perfume.

It is impossible for a youth not to be drawn towards women at this epoch of his life. It is the moment when brothers would be born, if man had been unfortunate enough to have lived hitherto without idolising his sister.

This return of Allan's friendship, a reconciliation she had not sought, but which she desired and did not dare to hope for, as the poor child had been made distrustful by her sufferings, caused more than a difference of sun, in Camilla's sight, between the Willows and Italy. So the idea of returning to France saddened her. The journey increased her regret, by reminding her that each day subtracted entire leagues of her beloved Italy, and each night a "good-bye" fell from her, tearing from her heart a farewell she would have wished to prolong indefinitely. In the daytime, she partly dissembled her impressions. But at eventide, the tidal hour of tears, she wept, looking out of the carriage window, while Allan and Madame de Scudemor thought she was busy inhaling the air of these climes drenched with perfume. Is this the only time that with the marvellous absurdity of touching gratitude, we put our joy down to the credit of the country where we have been happy?

III.

Returning to the Willows with this feeling of regret, Mademoiselle de Scudemor once more looked upon the land she did not love, and from which winter had removed all that might have reminded her ever so feebly of Italy. If Allan had not been so affectionate to her, she would have been very unhappy. She had never made the slightest allusion to the happiness she had felt when he had drawn near to her once more, treating her as in days gone by; but this unhoped-for felicity strengthened her against present trials and future presentiments. Indeed, her position was rather a sad one. She was about to pass the winter in complete solitude. What she had seen of society, where her mother had taken her in Italy, had awakened those instincts dormant in all women, making them love parties, jewels, and all that existence of the eyes which always precedes that of the heart. It seemed as if she above all others ought to have preferred the brightness, the movement, and the rapidity of

these intoxicating delights that crowd into a young girl's brain when she first comes out, to a life of laziness or the retirement of domestic life.

She was not one of the contemplative class, a Minna von Barnheim, with long lashes, as sad and black as a raven's wing; one of those pale, moonlight-faced beings who pass their lives leaning on their elbows, and who teach us to understand Eternity, as we bestir ourselves uselessly by their side. She was not an angel, as the poets of that time styled it, one of those seraphic natures, never touching the earth save with the tip of her ivory toes, regretting her beautiful wings; but a real woman, as the ancients understood her, made from the foam of the sea, worthy of her stormy origin, calm or impetuous, and also with unfathomable depths beneath.

If we have seen her at the close of childhood a prey to fits of sadness that the most ardent as well as the most tender suffer from, her despondency had a cause in the wounding ways of Allan. She was self-contained, but not vague or vacant. She was grieved, but not melancholy, and through the transparent tinge of age and sex, there could nevertheless be felt an unconquerable element of reality in that little lass. As far as regards the possession

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of more sensibility than intellect, the daughter of Yseult could well be recognised in Camilla; because woman, although placed on the highest rung of the ladder of intelligence, never possesses more than a fragment of mind—a kind of torso, incomplete, unfinished, broken (whose fault is it?), and Yseult herself had not been able to escape this formidable law, made by the hand of man in the name of God.

If Camilla had had great love for her mother, or if her mother had loved her very much, the daughter would have felt the sweetness of devotion, making her forget everything but the fact that she should shut herself up with the authoress of her being at the Willows to nurse her. But Camilla's affection not being deep enough for her to find happiness in such abnegation, how could she struggle against imaginative tendencies that carried her far from the life she was forced to put up with? Her passionate heart revolted against arid duties, and she could not even enjoy the austere joy of fulfilment of duty. Madame de Scudemor would not accept the attentions of her daughter. She repulsed them softly and affably, not so much because they were useless, as that they were fatiguing for the young girl. But she was, nevertheless,

so firm in her absolute refusals that Camilla, who had always feared her mother, did not dare to insist.

But Allan remained to her, and he remained alone. While he was present, she could find strength to support the empty and monotonous existence from which she suffered since she was no longer a little girl. When Madame de Scudemor had begged Allan to pass the winter in Paris, Camilla felt frightful fear lest he should accept. Clever at hiding all she felt—result of appalling education bestowed by pain, and by which she had greatly profited—she let nothing escape her of her fright at first, nor of her later joy when Allan refused to depart. This caused her for many days such inward intoxicating delight that one evening she left the embrasure of the window where she was at work, and started to look for Allan to thank him for stopping at the Willows. She could not conceal her gratitude. She who had wept inwardly when Allan had repulsed her, felt the exuberant joy of her heart brimming over.

She found him in the library, where he used to work since he felt no more love for Yseult. At that moment, the beginning of the darkness of night did not allow enough light to filter through

the windows to enable one to distinguish objects plainly. He was seated in front of an open book, but not reading; one hand thrust through his hair, and with the other bending an ivory paper-knife. He did not seem to be troubling much about what he was doing. He was thinking of what Madame de Scudemor had said to him the day she tried to force him to make up his mind to return to Paris.

"'Tis I, Allan," said she, as she entered. "You are not at work for the moment, and it is dark; so I do not disturb you, do I?"

"Has your mother sent you to fetch me?" asked Allan, with precipitation.

"No, it is not mother, Allan. I have come of my own accord to—"

She had an immense desire to throw herself into his arms and confess everything; but true sentiment makes one timid, even though it be a feeling of gratitude. She could not finish her sentence, and burst into tears. He rose and ran to her.

"What ails you, my dear Camilla? You alarm me!" said he, showing by his fear that he was interested in her. "Has some misfortune happened to you?"

"Oh, no," she returned, in a broken voice, "say

rather a little joy!" and the innocent lass pressed her face against the young man's breast. "You must know, Allan, that I did not dare to let you see how happy you made me three days ago, when you replied to my mother that you would not go away. Oh, I was mad with joy, and that evening I wanted so much to tell you, so that I should have died if I had kept silent." And the familiar *tutoiement* of their childhood rising to her lips again, she added: "So thank thee, Allan! thank thee, brother, for all the happiness thou givest me!"

Allan was greatly moved. Her old kind way of speaking revealed all Camilla's hidden tenderness for him.

"Yes, you are my sister, dear Camilla," said he, pressing her to him with the chastest embrace.

"Ah! thy sister for ever," she continued, as if drunk with pleasure. "Thou knowest not how thy sister loves thee! Didst thou know it, never wouldst thou leave her—thou couldst not!"

"But therefore," rejoined the young fellow, his tenderness aroused, "I will not leave you, Camilla!"

"Say 'thou' to me, if I am thy sister!" interrupted the impetuous creature, embracing him in

return with her puny arms as if they were made of iron, and taking his breath away.

"No, sister, I'll never leave thee—I swear it!"

"Never?" she cried impetuously, and with such force that she seemed as if mistress of the future.

"Never!" he repeated, under her influence.

And she threw her arms round his neck with still greater ardour than at first.

They were both much moved, and they wept, but their tears were of the sweetest. Alas! this was their first pure and deep joy. Both had signed an engagement for the future. It is a superb moment in life when the man says "Never!" as if he was God Almighty. Governed by the most beautiful feeling in the world—that of sister for brother and brother for sister—they had exchanged their souls. It was inconceivable happiness, which Allan enjoyed less than Camilla, because he had already used up his soul by passion, whereas the young girl's heart was full of that ignorance which made her fit for all the joys of life, but, above all, the most celestial, those which are to be found deep in our hearts. These are joys as candid as snow, but not as cold, which in a virgin bosom remain inaccessible to anything that may tarnish them. But if the imperceptible speck had not yet made

its appearance, could Camilla always preserve them from it?

From that day forth, she no longer felt the boredom with which the Château of the Willows inspired her. She was sure of her brother, sure that he would never fail her. All countries were alike to her, since he lived near her! As often happens, in the tumult of unaccustomed happiness, she pardoned the past and did not realise the present.

Allan thought more of it than she did. He had been in love. He had reached sad lustful virility. He asked himself if there was not something more than the friendship of a brother for a sister between Camilla and him; but as his senses had remained calm beneath the impression of her caresses, he answered himself in the negative with the greatest security. Moved by the sentiment that Camilla had suddenly revealed to him, he looked after her more than ever. He forgot the flight of time at her side, and they lived the same life. He read to her all the newest books, and they drank in ideas and sentiments from the same sources, agreeing perfectly with each other, when they talked the least, mingling the "thou" and the "you"; the latter aloud, and the former in a whisper, doing

so, not with the instinct of guilty feelings, but because the most angelical affections require mystery to enable us to collect our thoughts; because in expressions too loudly spoken there is a secret leakage, whence escapes the divine ether. He understood the position of Mademoiselle de Scudemor towards her mother. He perceived the icy barrier separating the two women. He explained to himself the vivacity of Camilla's affection by her being isolated from every loving being but him at a moment when she had the most need of affection, and could not suppose that her friendship hid a less pure sentiment. Thus were the dangers of their intimacy veiled by the most reassuring motives and the habits of their entire life, so that they gently slid over this naphtha flooring through which later on the pressure of their feet would cause the flames to burst.

This life was all the more sweet for Allan because it was all new to him. Had he had any real intimacy with Madame de Scudemor at the moment when he loved her? We have seen with what despair he regretted its absence. On the other hand, even if Yseult had loved him with the same love as he had had for her, their intimacy would always have been troubled by the spontaneous con-

tradictions of passion. Intimacy supposes placid affection, mutual self-denial, and a depth of harmony that sensuality always excludes more or less. Intimacy means hermaphroditism, by the fusion of both sexes into one soul. But in love there are always two.

In this delicious intimacy there is a restful virtue which suits wounded hearts admirably. Peace is exhaled that calms and strengthens them. The abode of light and repose promised to suffering souls by Christianity is sometimes to be found on this earth in the soul of someone who loves us, but with a feeling still more spiritual than that of sacred friendship. Allan was learning this, and his difficult imagination, which two years' experience had caused to forego some of its impulsive exactions, being quieted down, he put up with what he had formerly made light of. When we have seen ever so little of the world, must we not sigh less heavily, moderate the ardour of our ambitions, and shelter and enclose ourselves in some little spot of the vast expanse that we coveted in its entirety, and which, however small it may be, like the house of Socrates, will remain empty as if it was very large? Allan put up with days that were all alike, bringing about the same incidents, events,

and impressions—days that were a little pale, and without perfume; excepting, perhaps, a vague odour of violets reminding us of some evening when one is more deeply moved as both speak together, when the kiss remains on the brow where it is lightly bestowed. If it would be a touching sight to see Isaac Newton, sublime old man, returning from his heavenly habitation, picking up—as he would a lost world—some poor rose soaked in the heavy dew of a misty morning, and forgetting his lofty meditation while he breathed its perfume for a whole day, it was none the less strange to see Allan enchanted with the sweetness and modesty hidden in the depths of her retired and simple life. For between her existence, coursing so slowly and uniformly, and this young man to whom a single passion had given the desire of varied and powerful emotion, and who was so poetically organised for ecstasy or martyrdom, who had imagined everything and, alas! experienced every feeling, there was almost as much difference as between the rose and Newton's thoughts.

Nevertheless, was it only the charm of intimacy that lured Allan on, and kept him to Camilla's side? Was it only so as to enjoy the softness of this bath of sweet waters, after the rough days of

sensuality, that he plunged therein with such comfort? In the dumb or half-spoken effusions that showed in a look, or manifested themselves by a smile, was there not for him some unknown wish of the heart? Oh, the misery of still living egotism, and the trace of effaced passion, which is a deep furrow left in our softened heart, showing of what mud it was made! Whatever attachment Allan felt for Camilla, whatever joy he experienced in the intimacy of the amiable girl, a motive, which was neither this attachment nor happiness, made this intimacy more precious still, without Camilla being aware of it.

This motive was his position with Madame de Scudemor. She had so embarrassed him the day when she had begged him to leave the Willows for Paris, that he did not doubt for a moment but what she had guessed at all he had hidden from her till then. Was there not happiness—slightly mocking happiness, it is true—in the allusions she had made to the love of society that he had developed in Italy? He feared lest these allusions should become more positive still, and that he might have to confess to her that she was not mistaken—an avowal from which he recoiled. As he had not dared to take the initiative, he did not desire to put

up with it from the lips of his Yseult. This was a petty, narrow-minded, and vain view of the question, but one which irresistibly dominated him, for we cannot judge ourselves apart from the passion we carry within us.

It is when passion dies away that a man sees the vileness of the seed from which has grown the gathered fruit. Then he can take an inventory of the sad trees on which it ripens, forming a bitter examination of the conscience, such as Allan had not spared himself. But that was only half the evil. The result of all passion is to leave in the soul a habit of weakness which is often incurable; and it is not only the organs that are enervated. The end of this shameful lingering is not easily to be seen. We are led by terrible consequences, and an irresistible fate which poisons slowly, its force being only felt when we resist, and we never do!

Allan held on to his past life by this sad condition of weakness. Such is the inextricable bond which fastens the sheaf of past events to the life of the moment. It was a false and scabrous position that Madame de Scudemor sought not to make any plainer; a painful situation of which the tender and devoted friendship of Camilla did not en-

tirely soften the asperities. The silence of Madame de Scudemor showed Allan that she perceived the change in him, and what a deep knowledge she possessed of the young man's position.

"Why," she said to herself, "call forth an explanation painful for him, useless for me? Is not all finished between us? He no longer suffers. This confusion caused by his having been read by her whom he had never tricked, this embarrassment born from regret of the affection of which the emptiness is now recognised, will not last long."

And by these reasons, always full of generosity, she grew firmer in her resolution not to speak to Allan about what he seemed to fear. Lastly, on the other hand, she remarked with joy the tranquil affection, brotherly ties, and confidence established between Allan and Camilla, which was for her an eloquent proof how naught subsisted now of the love that had so long afflicted her.

IV.

This was the happiest period for the characters in this story. Madame de Scudemor had regained that noble tranquillity which was reflected in her whole person in such a striking manner. But she was still languishing beneath the illness she had brought back from Italy, and which the doctors did not characterise. She suffered patiently. The sufferings of the soul had taught her not to trouble about those of the body. She was not one of those amiable, weak creatures who cannot resist a headache or a slight sprain. For fear of importuning others, this egotist, who loved nothing, as society said, knew how to smile while in pain.

If Allan had not formerly loved Madame de Scudemor, if he had always been for her what he was now, he would have enjoyed the exquisite sweetness of the present moments without uneasiness; but the past, with memories and fears, rose up to disturb him in the bosom of this infinite peace that he could hardly have suspected to be possible, and which was about to have an influence,

perhaps despite himself, on the sentiments he had for Camilla, and ought to have made her happy; for affection is only real when it has none of the positive and devouring elements of passion.

Camilla, who also had a past—which was to crop up later on—gave herself up without after-thought to the joy of loving and being loved. The sensibility that Madame de Scudemor had never wished to develop in her as a child now poured itself out for Allan, like a torrent searching to make its bed. In the lack of maternal feeling, Camilla had always loved Allan exclusively, but her affection was not like what it had become since she had betrayed the secret of it. Women desire happiness so much that they fight against their most impetuous sentiments when they are uncertain if their feelings are shared and reciprocated. Their struggle hides weakness still. But when doubt exists no longer, then their soul flies, with all the rapidity and strength bestowed by the wants of the heart, to that sentiment which already swayed them, and the more their love becomes bold, the more it increases.

Camilla gave way to hers, oblivious of everything but this sentiment. It was so great and so deep that not a desire was mingled with it. It sufficed unto itself, like the Supreme Being, of which

this love, only felt once in life, and which some never feel at all, is the most faithful image. She was truly happy. Through the inconceivable magic of the heart, she was happy in the solitude of the Willows, during this sad winter, was Mademoiselle de Scudemor, who had come into the world to shine out by beauty and fascination of every kind in those fashionable salons to which her imagination summoned her, and of which she would have been the queen by divine right. She, who was a born empress, she whom a sick chamber suited so little, she was happy in this isolation of a remote, rainy country spot, far from everything that might have sympathised with the turn of her mind or the nature of her disposition. She so revelled in her felicity that the ardour of being happy, eternally anchored in woman's heart, sufficed her no more.

This joy of a heart that was full of delight gave her extraordinary brilliancy. Happy women are strange creatures in every way. When met with for the first time, one is struck as by the aspect of some marvel, and we cannot guess at first what surprises and confuses us; for we can only recognise what we have already seen, and where have we looked upon happiness so as to be able to know it again? They seem made up of soft and penetrat-

ing light which is not the same as what shines at noonday or in the stars. They have movements which are no longer the agitations of our thoughts or the versatility of our whims, but a rhythm of the celestial poetry that sings in their soul. One might call it a momentary revelation of everything we do not understand. They are rare and ephemeral beings, living out life in the immense depths where extremes meet in the unity of common destiny, and unhappy by reason of their happiness, because they cannot die of it.

Thus it was that Yseult, that most unhappy woman, sometimes said to herself that her daughter was growing up to be very beautiful without knowing what so embellished her. Perhaps she thought it was the budding of youth, while it was the irradiation of happiness. Who can paint what has no shape and no analogy in the great symbolism of nature? We can see the halo round the brow of men who have genius, love, and enthusiasm; but happiness is more difficult to express. It is something purer and more divine.

The happy life of Camilla was reflected on her features, changing the character of her beauty, and betraying thereby the mystery which escaped Madame de Scudemor's penetration. It was the

first time that such black eyes had the tenderness of the softest blue orbs. The power of passion to which they had formerly testified had given way to a moist sparkling of comfort, as timid as the star followed by the shepherd. Her mouth, so voluptuous in its ardent curves, that an angel in heaven, if he had had it, would have perhaps shared something of humanity among the virgins of the elect, was now as if clothed with melodious serenity. Her forehead, burnt by the sun of Italy, beneath the network of its dark veins threw out rays, like the opal of a morning sky, from the light that the heart unceasingly gave out. One might have said —but this is contradictory!—that day made its way through night, if it could appear in the night, without driving darkness away.

This beauty of happiness which impressed Madame de Scudemor had also struck Allan, but he understood it no better than she did. Although it was impossible for him to be mistaken about the energy of Camilla's friendship, he did not believe, however, that he was the cause of this magnificent reflection of the light of the heart on the beauty of a woman. It is an astonishing thing that men lose some of their instinctive fatuity in proportion as the feelings of which they are the object acquire

vehemence. One boasts of a caprice. One is silent about a passion. Is that from knowledge of oneself or cowardice? Alas! perhaps both. Allan was not vain enough to guess rightly with regard to Camilla. He admired her as he loved her, but he sought no more for the secret of her beauty than he had sought to thoroughly examine her love.

In everyday life Camilla was serious and spoke but little. As much as her childhood had been taken up with mad laughter and wild gaiety, so was her girlhood grave. It will be remembered that early suffering had deprived her of those leaps of life which are only impetuous movements in the spontaneous nature of children, and once gone, never return again. When suffering had disappeared, happiness made her retire within herself still more. If she had had a mother like all other young girls; if she had gone out into society, she would probably not have been less lively in her gaiety than other young persons of her age. The sprightliness of the child would have been faintly seen in the ardour of an alluring, versatile, passionate, sensual, and witty woman. She would have had sudden desires, amiable and absurd; and cries from her harmonious throat crowning a laugh of bold abandonment with thirty-two

precious pearls, and she would have been alive to exterior impressions for which she was principally destined. But in solitude and by the side of a mother whom she feared in spite of the softness of her manner, already broken in to the lies of wounded feelings, she had got into the habit of silence and reserve, and had turned all the activity of her soul towards herself. And besides, she was happy!—a vast word that is an answer to everything. When one is happy one fears to lose by the wavelets of the most fugitive gaiety a few drops of the nectar in which the heart is drowned.

Allan was touched by Camilla's silent way of loving, which contrasted so greatly with the memories he had of her and her childhood. He loved her all the more because he had been cruelly hard towards the charming young girl, and this idea moved him to tenderness. On the other hand, his thoughts, held in bondage under the influence of Madame de Scudemor, found their level once more with Camilla. He felt himself more of a man, and the relations between man and woman had become what they ought to be. At the bottom of all our feelings there exists a vast amount of indestructible personality. It is difficult for a man to shake it off. In his most devoted affections, he

appears entire, violent, an immense ego! and it is not for a powerful motive, or some great cause, or on a solemn occasion that he suddenly breaks out. A flower looked at for too long, a book not closed quickly enough when someone approaches, a piano or a harp to which one is too much devoted, these things which are the rivals of feelings in musical souls, are quite enough to make us victims or despots in presence of emotions or interests of which we are not the cause; enough to raise fear, and frightened men are cruel.

Camilla's style of adoration necessarily excited Allan, so he unfolded before her a varied collection of thoughts. Any other woman would have found him seductive, eloquent and irresistible. But she was enchanted with him, and she never asked herself if it was she who had made him like that, or if he was really thus. She listened to him as he expounded his views upon everything, or the least trifle, and she garnered up his utterances as if he was an oracle. Her intellectual life, as well as tangible existence, seemed to flow from him. Whether he spoke to her, or whether he read some poet—one of those men with a crystal flute who, like the musician of old, puts evil passions to sleep in the heart—she was pleased, and palpitated as

he talked, with downcast eyes, a pink cloud or a touch of pallor on her cheek; and she often felt that to bring herself to her senses she had but to look at him; that prevented her from fainting. Her life, ready to leave her, caught at the man she loved, and did not sink; while all these delicious and poignant sensations were so deep that nothing betrayed her to Madame de Scudemor, nor even to Allan.

It was a relief to Madame de Scudemor to see that the fine faculties of Allan had escaped from the thraldom of sensuality, and had survived it. She also was happy as she listened to him. But it was sad felicity without emotion and without joy, expressly formed for her whose soul no longer possessed the power to taste the least pleasure with any energy. Sometimes, led away by the torrent of young de Cynthry's ideas, she found her animated language once more, as if diluted in the colours of her now faded life, such as she had had with him on certain days, and which she was not known to use in society, where her thoughts floated on torpid conversations like a cork on stagnant water. But such moments were short. Enthusiastic ideas had no more effect upon this woman than enthusiastic feelings. She smiled, not for

other people, but inwardly, when her words became inflamed with the reflection of Allan's discourse, at the moment when her impressions were not even tepid, when her last interest had just expired with that boy's love, showing the woman's habits of intellect that had been hers formerly, and that misfortune and passion had destroyed.

Another woman than the Countess de Scudemor would have perhaps been curious to know what Allan, now quite cool, thought of her and her conduct. But such an idea could not strike her. Vanity could not cause this last and subtle complaint to be heard in her heart. Although Allan seemed to her to be worth more than other men, if it was only the superiority of youth, he was also a man, and she was careless of his opinions and his scorn. When she saw him suffering on her account, she had obeyed her womanly instinct; and had this caused her to be misjudged by anybody, including Allan, she cared little or naught. If Allan, ungrateful, turned the ideas of vulgar morality against her, or, soaring above the hypocritical and common crowd, maintained that respect for her which she seemed perhaps to deserve, she did not esteem that as a reward or a grief. Indifference, and not pride, prevented even this idea from being

born, to disturb the slumber of indolence into which she had fallen again, since she alone was no longer in question.

As Allan saw that the Countess de Scudemor did not reiterate the allusions she had once put forward, all that remained to him of fear and anxiety finished by dying away. Dreamily weak as formerly, because passion had not broken him down sufficiently to make a man of him, or less than a man, he did not envisage the future with a tranquil eye. He did not ask himself what would be the result of the accumulating days of that period. He had suffered great pains, and had been cured of them as of an illness which makes the patient more fit to fight life's battles. For a long time he had found himself tainted, belittled, and a coward; and now he could forget it all during this shameful truce, when imagination and his nerves had swallowed up the conscience. He had stifled his, which was an importunate witness of all his fresh weaknesses in the satin-wool of his life without an issue. He had smothered it like Desdemona, but without rage, under some of the cushions of those divans where daily he became more and more effeminate between the two women. The patent and absolute happiness of Camilla did not

make him joyful; he no longer possessed the freshness of heart or primitive energy that has never been tired out. But he revelled in a kind of vague beatitude. His old sufferings were no more than a dream of his mind. Are there not days when the blue waves of contentment cover the soul grown cheerful, and hide all memories? But as this Lethe dries up quickly, and only brings its consolling illusions at long intervals, Allan was able to thank the present for interposing itself between him and the past. One hid the other. All that might have reminded him of it was erased, even as far as Madame de Scudemor was concerned. More than ever she felt the approach of old age, and its signs stood out plainer by the contrast of Camilla's youthful beauty. Allan could no longer recognise his idol. No more was there before his eyes the beauty he had so long adored, like a dumb and striking reproach to the frailty of his love. In that at least he was happy, if it is happiness, alas! if, men, made of dust, we do not sooner remain stupefied beneath the sting of reproach without understanding its eloquence; and if, disengaged from the respect of a sentiment that was the very essence of ourselves, we can look without anger and see the face covered with our former kisses be-

come nothing more than an inanimate and plaster mask grown ugly, even if the features do not show to others the love they testified for us, promising still greater happiness than we enjoyed.

V.

It was the depth of winter. Madame de Scudemor's health did not improve, but nevertheless she grew no worse. Beneath her gaze, Camilla and Allan still lived in the same intimacy, half hidden, half visible. They never left each other. The subject of their conversation was most often their memories of Italy. Their chat seemed innocent, and there was perfect confidence, although they did not tell each other what existed in their lives at the epoch they talked about, and which they would most certainly have found if they had searched properly; but, perhaps, they had both forgotten.

One day, when their conversation had a more tender tone than ever, on one of those afternoons when souls press one against the other with heat and comforting warmth, a day of cloudy sky, of wind that heralds rain, of sparrows, dying of hunger beneath the cruel north wind, coming to complain uselessly on the window-sill, whence through the panes we see them fly away; Madame de Scude-

mor on her *causeuse* was busy turning over the leaves of some new books which had been sent to her from Paris, and she did not interfere in the slightest degree with what Allan and Camilla might have been saying to each other. A strange fit of sadness came over these happy children. Simultaneously and rapidly they experienced an indivisible sensation, they knew not why. At that moment their discourse had not been of a kind that drives us, as we give way to secret inspirations, to the infinite vacuity of secret melancholy. It might have been the torn edge of a cloud fading away in their heaven of thought, so profound, so pure, and so vast; a drop of rain in their ocean; a stifled sigh in their immense happiness—it was nothing, or rather it was everything. Where destinies are built up, theirs had just been destroyed, and this was the reaction.

Poor woman! you are right to be suspicious. Superstition is a livelier comprehension of the mysteries of human life. Long before the annihilation of happiness, one feels suddenly at the bottom of the heart that it has just suddenly been destroyed, and with that terrible idea we continue to enjoy it. Thus in the plenitude of existence we feel a single palpitation in the midst of positive

joys, and the burst of youth, and although we may live many strong and well-filled years, the touch of the fatal finger has been felt, and it is as if Death had come!

Camilla looked at Allan, who returned her glance. They said not a word. A tear, which dried on the lids that tried to drink it, was all that betrayed the woman—a being as yet untried—the greatest joy and the greatest weakness. That was all the difference there was between her and Allan. Her tear was not one of those hot and fresh drops that escape us in youth, rolling down to wash the face and heart like a wave of divine delight, but one of those that come unaccompanied, rare and scalding. Allan did not ask the reason of that tear. He knew.

It was all over already. The sadness had only lasted the necessary time for a tear to dry. Camilla took up her interrupted task, Allan resumed the conversation without a word that alluded to this unknown sensation that had assailed them at the same time, and in close contact, gaily conversing, they reached the close of day in the deep bay window, as if nothing solemn had just passed between them.

When night had quite closed in, Allan left the

room. Generally he sat at the work-table, which was placed near Madame de Scudemor, and by the light of the lamp he would design some pattern for Camilla's embroidery. Thus passed the evening until the moment when fatigue forced the Countess to retire. Then the day was closed by a "Good-night!"—a dumb summing-up of all the tenderness of the day—and each one went to bed with the perspective of beginning the next day over again in about the same style as that of the day before, a routine that was never tiresome, because it was the unity of adorable feeling; because happiness, when it is deep, suffices to fill the heart and the thoughts.

In vain Camilla looked several times impatiently towards the door. Allan did not return. Where was he? He was not in the habit of going out of the room at that moment. Vague uneasiness came over her, but she only bent her head all the more obstinately over her work. It was insensate anxiety, for why should she be anxious? Might not he be in the library, or even in the garden, taking the air after a day passed in a shut-up room? Besides, did he not leave her often thus? Was it not childish to wish to have him eternally tied to her girdle? But these reasons that she argued out to

herself did not prevent her brow being still cast down over the hands that now worked slower and slower. Impatience caused their veins to swell, as well as the efforts she made in holding her breath to better catch the sound of footsteps in the corridor. From being vague the uneasiness became oppressive. She felt it increasing, growing in the silence. She said not a word to her mother, who was reading on the other side of the table, but her thoughts grew wildly delirious. What woman does not know this pain I tell of here?

Allan, who had no idea of the anxiety he was causing, had taken a gun, whistled his dog, and bent his steps towards the marshes. He never went out for a day's shooting, but sometimes bowled over a wild duck or two while strolling in the neighbourhood, which abounded in all kinds of game. That evening he felt mechanically the want of movement, of the open air, to be alone, to think freely, and as a pretext for his absence and for a walk in this inclement season he resolved to try his luck with the black and white flights of teal with which the fen was covered. Everywhere submerged, the marsh was now nothing more than an immense lake, upon which one might have navigated a small vessel. Allan jumped into a boat

belonging to the domestics of the Château, and which in winter time they moored at the foot of a willow tree. A pale light floating like a vapour beneath the sky heavy with thick clouds inundated all objects with a white hue. The eyes grew fatigued and discouraged when looking over the long streaks of this damp desert of which the water shone like a mirror, now and then marked by the skimming teal. But Allan seemed to have forgotten his sporting projects. He was seated in the little skiff, absorbed in his thoughts, his gun by his side. The north wind cut his face, and with a lazy hand he abstractedly caressed his dog's head, which, with its long black silky ears, was fondly and familiarly resting on his knee. Near the Douve, lost in the distance, a bittern—that enormous hawk of the marshes—now and then tore asunder the heavy silence with his harsh cry. The white and blue mass formed by the Château of the Willows, with its slate roof and its garlands of dainty roses sculptured on its walls, darkened by the rains, seemed shivering in a cluster of green trees, more dark than usual when seen through the naked thicket.

"She loves me, and I love her, too!" he said to himself. "What will become of us? I only knew

it just now, or I would have fled. And now it is too late! She loves me. Oh, why for me who yearned for love since my earliest youth; for me who has wasted so much affection—why does the idea of being loved not overwhelm me with joy, and close my eyes to the future? Why do I not take my revenge on the past that has tortured me, by bravely dashing headlong into this love that I dreamt as being the finest thing in life? At last, Allan, here is the time to be happy! The moment has come to realise all your dreams! My dreams? Has my love for Yseult left one standing? Can I be happy now? In the midst of mutual affection, could I forget that passion which has aged me before my time? Will it not rise up like a mocking spectre, and appear to me even in Camilla's arms? Am I worthy of that pure, virginal child, so sensual and full of her first love—I, who have worn out my heart in a useless infatuation for her mother, of whom I can only think with a blush, since reason has returned to me? Why has this passion not dried up my inmost source of love? I am not yet like fatal Yseult! I know how I feel since I love her daughter! Her daughter? Ah, that idea is terrible! Why is Yseult her mother?"

'And so he went on, dashing himself against these two redoubtable questions.

'Allan de Cynthry's position was indeed a frightful one. Only now could he see it, and he was not master over a secret terror. The veil of the future was torn apart in this young man's mind, and although all was dark behind it, he made out some great and inevitable misfortune through the dense obscurity of presentiments. The sweet and restful life that he had enjoyed for the last two months was finished, and he began once more to descend into a fresh circle of the hell of lust and tears. Governed by the blackest thoughts, without knowing what he was doing, he tore the silky hair of his dog's neck; and the animal did not move, but tenderly bent his head to the brutal whim of his master, only uttering a little plaintive groan.

Unfortunate Camilla! And he also pitied the young, ignorant girl. But his pity was different to that of Madame de Scudemor. With him it was one of the sides of his love. The wan light of evening was fading away, and the water grew blacker every minute. The light in the windows of the Château, which could be seen from a long distance, reminded him that the ladies might be getting uneasy if he was late in returning home. He had

not found much relief in the sharp air and the desolate aspect of the winter landscape. As he had just fastened the boat to the willow, a heavy rustle above his head warned him of the passage of a bird. He thought it was some stork returning to its reedy shelter. Half out of justification for his departure from the Château, or else so as to escape by some act or movement from the painful thoughts which formed an obsession, he pulled the trigger of his gun, and sent the shot in the direction of the bird, which fell, and was fetched by his dog. But when his faithful friend returned, he saw it was not a stork, but Acis, the favourite swan of Camilla, that he had just killed. This appeared to him to have a terrible meaning, and he shuddered like a weak child. There are days when our mind is more or less open to every omen, and this was one of the fatal days for Allan. So he went back to the Château with his soul more rent than ever by sinister forebodings.

When he returned to the drawing-room, which was only lighted by the slight gleam of the lamp and the red reflection of the fire, he found no one there. Sometimes Madame de Scudemor left the *salon* during the evening. She might have been indisposed, and required the services of her daugh-

ter. This circumstance did not make him very uneasy. He drew a chair near Camilla's empty seat, but his foot struck against something on the carpet.

He looked and recognised Camilla in a dead faint. To seize hold of her, lift her up, and place her on the sofa was the work of a moment for him. He warmed her with his breath and against his breast, never thinking of leaving her in the state she was in while he called for help. After a few moments of despairing efforts and trouble to bring her back to life, she opened her eyes and recognised him.

"Ah, 'tis you—you at last!" she cried, wanting to rush to him, but falling back for want of strength.

"Yes, 'tis I, Camilla," he replied. And he asked her the reason of her sudden swoon.

"You were out," she said, still trembling all over. "I did not know what was the matter with me, but I was suffering. Mother had left me for a moment. I heard a shot, and fear made me faint."

"Silly girl," said Allan to her, on his knees in front of her, kissing her hands, which from icy-cold became moist, as when one swoons.

"Oh yes, quite crazy," she returned, "to have been so frightened by so little, eh, brother? Scold me for my cowardice. Am I not very childish? But, look you," she added, leaning towards him, and taking in his whole person with one thirsty glance, "never leave me in the evening. I'll not have it! Take pity," and already her lips formed themselves into a smile; "have pity on the foolish fears of your poor sister!"

And as she often did in all the admirable innocence of her heart, she tried to kiss him on the eyes; but he, who had just reckoned up in solitude the sentiment of which she did not discern the nature, repulsed her, with the generous instinct of an honest man. It was a noble movement, that God alone could judge, for she was mistaken, and with a voice showing her great yearning, as when the heart bleeds:

"Why do you push me from you, Allan?" she exclaimed. "Oh, Allan, why do you repulse me? What have I done to you?"

And seeing her ready to fall back into the same state as she had just been in, without reflecting, under the influence of the fear that overpowered him:

"But I do not repulse you, my Camilla," said

he, and he kissed her forehead quickly. "It was the remains of the fright you gave me," he added, trying to laugh. "Could I drive you from me, my darling sister?" and he sat by her side on the sofa.

"Yes, you did push me from you, my brother," she answered, in low and solemn accents. "Say it was involuntary—say that you were not thinking what you were doing, but you did repulse me! Listen, you have perhaps in your soul, like I have, something that you do not understand. For the first time you swore to me that I was really your sister, I feel completely changed. Something has taken place in my inmost being. I know not what to tell you, but I feel quite a different girl to-day. Oh, perhaps I shall seem to you to be more silly than ever!" and her voice was no longer grave, but accentuated with feeling. "But tell me that you understand me well, that it is the same with you."

"Yes, I understand you well. Yes, I am the same," said Allan slowly, like a fatal echo, following the train of thought which swayed him despite himself.

"And you know not what ails you any more than I do?" continued the young girl, with a woman's inquisitive grace, fearing the reply which she nev-

ertheless implored. "You, my elder brother, do not know either?"

"Yes, I know!" Allan rejoined roughly.

Then he stopped, and she, throwing herself back, as if in fear of the revelation that would come from him:

"Tell me," she returned, with one of those glances that cause the nightingale to drop from the tree on to the grass where the serpent is waiting, or drag the secret from a man's lips to fall into a woman's bosom.

"Well, sister," said Allan, conquered after a pause, "I think we both love each other too much!"

Did the formidable glare of these words illuminate Camilla's heart? Did she see the nakedness of her misery? Did the past, awakened by this supreme sentence, show her the future that lay before her? Did she understand? Or did she try to understand? Be that as it may, she could not have cast down her head with greater consternation or more crushing silence if she had realised the truth.

Madame de Scudemor came back, and taking her seat again on her *causeuse:*

"What are you doing there, my children?" she said, with her tranquil grace.

"Camilla fainted through the heat of the room," answered Allan. "She drew away from the fire. But it is all over now."

"Are you sure of that?" said Madame de Scudemor, looking steadfastly at Camilla with amiable interest. "Shall Allan open a window, if you want air?"

"Thank you, mamma," replied Camilla, "I am quite well now."

And she took up her work again. Allan, whom the Countess did not interrogate concerning his departure from the drawing-room, placed himself by Camilla's side, and asked Madame de Scudemor what were the books that had been sent to her from Paris. And thus with three or four insignificant questions they all three silently finished the evening, until the moment when the clock struck half-past eleven, which was about their habitual hour for retiring to rest.

VI.

CAMILLA TO ALLAN.

"'*We love each other too much!*' you said. That is what disturbs our life, which up to the present has been so gentle, so sweet, so happy! That is what makes me hide my tears now. That is what has made these last three days so sad. *We love each other too much!* Ah! brother, I thought I could never love you enough!

"I loved you, and that was my joy, my life, my destiny. I feel that I love you still, that it is my fate to do so always; but why is it my joy no longer? Why does this love, which was so sweet to my soul, become so bitter now? You are not changed. I am not altered. Nothing is different about us. Why, with us, is not everything the same? *We love each other too much!* Are you mad to think so? Is it possible to love too much? Should our mutual love prevent happiness, when to love makes us so happy? You are mistaken, Allan, my brother! If happiness causes us to suffer, it

would not be happiness; and without disclaiming either, you can no more say, 'too much happiness' than you can 'too much love'!

"Happiness! Oh! say do you feel it as I do? Do you desire it like me? Perhaps in our two felicities there is the difference that is in us, brother mine—the difference between brother and sister? I know not; I am a dunce, and love has made me proud; but many a time, Allan, during our long talks, your glance, intent on mine, did not show the happiness with which I was flooded. But did mine show it better? If I had been in your eyes to see myself, should I have found that I was looking happy enough? Perhaps you thought the same as I did? Perhaps I am crazy to believe I can feel happiness better than you can, adored brother? Pardon me this mad presumption! Let it indicate to you the thirst for felicity which burns me! Although you have quenched it for the last two months, whence comes it, Allan, that my thirst is not yet appeased? I can understand that my roses have no more odour when I have inhaled them for some time, but next day I find fresh scent in fresh flowers, or one would have to pray to God to make others. Alas! brother, my exhausted happiness is as if there was no more per-

fume in new blossoms, and all I can do is to supplicate Thee, God of my life, to create some other happiness for me!

"Yes, Allan, give me happiness. Make me happy at all cost! You can! You can do whatever you like with Camilla. Have I not just been so happy through you that I wished to know no more of the world, and hoped for nothing more from heaven? Your love, oh, my brother, has it not made me a most satisfied creature? You can see well enough that we do not love each other too much, since that very love does not suffice any more. Believe me when I say that I shall not give way beneath the weight of joy. If I complain, I do not ask for quarter. My heart is full of superhuman power. You may oppress it, but it will not be stifled. Oh, Allan! give me more! still more! Happiness, friend, or death!

"I write to you, Allan, and I weep. Mother is in bed. I suffered so much for the last few days, that the idea struck me that I would write to you this evening. I have suffered much. I am forced to use that word, because no other exists; but will it fully set forth what I endured, friend? No! because it was not through pain, but merely because I was not happy—is that not all the grief of life?

Not to be happy, and to possess a soul, a beating heart, thoughts that blossom in our brain, and yet be unhappy! Oh, what anguish! Take pity on what I feel within me. You ought to be able to suffer more courageously than a weak woman. Allan, I ask for your pity. Pity is still love! Do not say that we love each other too much! But if you love me too much, would you wish me to love you more? Alas! can I ever destroy this unconquerable instinct that feeds on my vitals, oh, my sweet friend?

"*We love each other too much!* How you said that, Allan! How solemn was your tone! How pale you were! How like you were to that angel we saw in Florence together, and who was blowing the trumpet of the Day of Judgment! How I have remembered the accent with which you used to speak! The words spoken by you pursue me! I think of them unceasingly. But I am afflicted without being frightened; for your talk shows no regret. You made us one with your incomprehensible *we love each other too much!* Whatever it prophesies, or whatever it hides, will strike us both. Let us, then, love each other fearlessly, friend! What hinders us from loving? However closely we may press one against the other, who could one

day separate us? Do you know who could? Who? When I look, I see nothing. In darkness we dream of many an abyss. We are children, but let us lean together—you on me, me upon you—and thus march into futurity, my dear Allan! Let us love each other in all confidence. Is your heart not as pure as mine? Ah! however I struggle against the fatal words you uttered, however I surround myself with hope, my tears flow, oh, angel of my destiny, as if it was true that too much love drives all happiness out of one's life."

VII.

Camilla's letter caused Allan to make fresh steps in paths of horror. It opened horizons full of storms that he could see lowering in the future. What did this young girl mean? what was she to thus attach herself to him with the mighty strength of unique affection? what could this weak creature be, whose desires of happiness were so intense? He understood that she would not care to love him aimlessly or vainly, and that she did not spare him any of the possibilities of happiness. It was a cruel ordeal, terminating in despair! He asked himself how he could keep up a struggle with this girl, whose unruly passion urged her to be happy "at any cost," when she already felt herself encouraged by the love that he knew he felt for her? To be ignorant of her own feelings on the one hand, and know so much on the other, seemed to him to be a strange and threatening thing. An entirely human cry resounded through these marvellously pure sighs, and this fraternal tenderness

was a bizarre and formidable thing. When passions have not yet lost their innocent character, their hidden limits are boundless.

The last lines of Camilla's letter brought doubt to his mind. Did she suspect the secret sealed to the lips of Madame de Scudemor, and to his? And, half out of respect for Yseult, half out of indulgence for his gradually growing passion, he tried to deceive her.

"You are right, Camilla," he answered her, "let us love each other more than ever! Let us love and be happy. If to be happy you only require your brother's adoration, how delighted you will be henceforward! Your letter has doubled the affection that I had for you. My darling, how large-souled you are! I want to fill it entirely; no matter how deep it may be, I will load it with my love to the brim.

"Pardon me the words that hurt your feelings uselessly, my dearly beloved child. Let those sentences, incomprehensible for you, always remain so. You guessed rightly when you said that they did not isolate me from you by regret. Why should I repent having loved you? But, as you say yourself, there are differences in the ways of being

happy, and if in loving you I feel that I am your equal, Camilla, in happiness, my soul is not worth yours. I do not possess your immense capacity for felicity. I have always been wary of life. When all seemed to smile upon me, existence appeared perfidious to me. My reason laughs at such superstition, but it has its revenge. Have I ever told you that I came into the world on a dark and icy winter's day—a day of sighs and tears, known as that of the dead, and those that have gone before seemed to have marked it with prophetic ashes? Yes, I have always thought that my natal day would have a fatal influence on my life and thoughts. Do you remember, sister, how in our childhood I often grieved you by my fits of sadness? Do you remember how I often drove you away so as to be alone? Poor little innocent thing, you did not know what ailed me! It was that, Camilla, the idea of the unknown, still vague, but already understood, and which crushed me with inexplicable presentiments.

"But, Camilla, I ought not to trouble your life with these anxieties of my destiny. When, in supplicating tones, you ask me for a little happiness, when you place in me all that you have of love to give and felicity to expect, I ought not to send you

back your prayer with the fatal follies of my heart. No, I prefer to share your enthusiastic pursuit of the happiness you find in love. Besides, has not this affection already put my dark thoughts to sleep? And since these two words have been as sweet for me as the Milky Way in the sky of a clear night, why should the days to come be different to those that are gone? Why should I not be allowed to believe in you more than in myself? I was wrong. I confess it, and I withdraw the imprudent words that caused your tears to flow.

"But listen, my sweet friend. If now and again, at the side of you whom I love, in the midst of this existence as we dreamt it, and as we realised it, a cloud comes over my brow, some thought freezes the smile upon my lips—shut your eyes and forget. It will never be aught but a rapid moment, a lightning flash extinguished as soon as seen. When you reopen your adored eyes, you will find me reassured and as calm as you. Do not be uneasy about these sudden instants, which you may even note in the midst of happiness; do not mind my obstinate disposition, which shows itself when I believe it conquered and disarmed! Absolve me from my eternal suspicions, if they ever reappear and show themselves, to be again lost in the delights of our union.

This suspicion, darling sister, will never attach itself to love. Do not grieve; your pity would be too cruel for me. As my love suffices you, would you, by not being perfectly happy, punish me for not being as happy, Camilla, as you are?"

Certainly, Allan was genuine in writing thus to Mademoiselle de Scudemor. But the idea of being destined for misfortune is one that may seize upon men without madness, as unhappiness is so certain that it is inevitable; but was that the entire secret of his sadness? No, without a doubt! But he dispersed suspicion, or met it half-way, in pointing out this scepticism, which was one of the traits of his disposition. Anyhow, he acted thus more with thoughts of Madame de Scudemor than of himself, for he regarded himself as already attacked by the implacable fatality of Camilla's love. But he hoped, at least, that these two women who were destined to break his heart, each in her way, would not break theirs, one against the other, after having destroyed his.

When we are the toys of some adored fatality which drives us on to the goal we fear by the road we might have chosen ourselves, we easily forget that we are victims. It is less a preconceived idea

than the stupidity of sensuality, and man, distinguished from animals because he can foresee the future, feeds upon the flowers of life like the ox fattened for the sacrifice. Allan was loved. This joy of being loved has such delightful sweetness and intoxication that he hoped it would never fade. But when, from time to time, intelligence peered through his pleasures, he felt horrified at his delirium, and in despair threw himself headlong into their midst. Could he foresee the moment when he would invoke them still, but in vain?

VIII.

Life, however, seemed to have become as it was formerly for Allan and Camilla, but more ardent and concentrated. Each day brought fresh strength to their passion. It began to emerge from the depths of the unknown, where till then it had been concealed. It was like the rising tide of the sea, of which the distant murmur can be heard, wave following wave, behind the hill that masks its view, and it appears one day bright and luminous on the summit, having destroyed the cliff by its obstinate invasion.

Allan's letter had entirely calmed Camilla's fears. She pitied his suspicious disposition, of which he had never spoken, and it now furnished her with the explanation of many of his sad moments. Whether her love should conquer her brother's mistrust or not was a reason for her to love him more. In love, alas! everything is a further motive.

"I will prove the falsity of his presentiments," she said to herself.

And, indeed, her looks, her voice, the touch of her hand when she placed it in his palm, her whole being, in fact, exhaled such love that he who adored her could not feel any fear or doubt. Madame de Scudemor could never suspect what mysterious waves of love rolled between these two young people who lived so intimately with her, and who seemed to be naturally enjoying simple family routine, in the face of this intercourse which was something more than the familiarity of habit, showing deep affection in a restrained and chaste way. She looked upon them with her dry eyes and pallid smile, and who knows if at the bottom of her heart she did not suffer at not being able to make a third party in the confidence of this friendship? But if that regret existed for Yseult, it was weak, and died silently where it was born, without her tranquil, wan face betraying its abortive existence.

Sometimes, when she was not in the drawing-room, Camilla innocently said to Allan:

"My mother little knows how much we love each other, brother."

And these words brought icy coldness in the midst of the tender feelings and inexhaustible sensations of Allan. The wretched youth had weighty reasons to hope that she might never know.

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"But," continued Camilla, ever intent in her embroidery, "what does it matter if she does not know it? Such things cannot be confided to anybody. Is it because I love only you, Allan, that it would be impossible for me to tell any one else how dear you are to me? And then mother, although she is so good to me, is so cold, that I feel more timid with her than with a stranger."

Allan dared not reply to these words. He knew how little Madame de Scudemor was Camilla's mother at heart. But he to whom she had revealed herself, knowing the cause of the aridity of that deceived and ulcerated heart, had such respect for her that a remark made about her coldness would have seemed to him hard and ungrateful. Camilla could not penetrate the motive of Allan's silence, but she loved him too much not to put it down to delicacy.

"You dare not accuse my mother," she went on, "you are so good and generous, my Allan! Neither do I accuse her. Perhaps she has not always been happy? Yet she never weeps, and I do not remember ever having seen her sad."

"That is because there are such great misfortunes," replied Allan, "that they dry up the sources of our tears, and downcast we seem to be

full of courage so much do they strike us with impassibility. You are at the dawn of life, sister, and to show grief you only know of tears, because when you suffer you weep. But is the heart always full, and must it be thought that your mother is less to be pitied if she feels this exhaustion?"

"Who has taught you all this?" said the guileless lassie to him.

But he took good care not to answer, or tell her where he had found out these facts, and how, although nearly as young as she, he had gained his knowledge. Under the impression of sadness created by his words, Camilla thought again about her mother.

"If you are right," she added, "I'll not be so unjust as to murmur ever so little against my mother's coldness. And besides, why should I complain, friend, since you are all in all to me? With you, I want nothing—not even my mother's love!"

And she spoke these charming words with an accent resounding like heavenly music going from the ear to the heart.

"Yes! I am an orphan as you are," she rejoined. "Let us love each other, Allan; let us love like poor children who have never had a moth-

er's tenderness to share. See now, I should almost be vexed if my mother loved me at this juncture. I am happy to be an orphan, for am I not more like you?"

And she looked at him in such a manner that he must have fainted if he had not reclined his head on her shoulder, as he felt himself overwhelmed with pure delight, and he enjoyed the sweetness of the tears that welled up in his eyes. She, younger and weaker, supported without giving way his head full of thoughts, and his brow upon which grief had already printed its furrow. She was proud of the emotion that she stirred up in this man, her elder brother in strength as by age. Where is the woman who has not deliciously played at being the mother of her lover, and has not cradled her protector and her king like a child upon her breast? She did not weep like Allan, but she smiled. Her eyes dropping to meet his, gave out a flame longer than her lashes and sweeter than the light of a May evening. Her dark cheeks, which seemed always a little opaque by reason of their brownish tint, became transparent as she blushed. It seemed as if a red carmine-like light coursed beneath the velvet skin, as that of a ripe peach or a gleaming fluid. She was more radiant, and not less touch-

ing, than Correggio's picture of the pale mother with her child at the breast, tears trembling on her cheek and flooding her smile; in seeing her, one could understand how much the pure love of a virgin is above maternal affection.

But if Yseult happened to return, her rival interrupted these long ecstasies and inconceivable felicities. The brimming confidence became a thin stream of water in the place where it had rolled along like a swollen river. However, the remembered charm of the past moment brought balm to the actual instants, and even that had its sweetness. The soul wants rest to fall back upon itself, so as to better taste its enjoyment. To reflect upon one's happiness, does not that double it?

If love could always be in our soul, as it was for these two young people, what a splendid thing it would make of life! How we should mourn for it, and die when it no longer existed! All that the poets have sung of mutual love and its happiness would be clumsy in comparison with that which would overwhelm us. And what adorable chastity there would be in the midst of all these abandonments! If there were thoughts that God had forgotten to clothe in less luminous fashion, they

would be thus mingled and intertwined in His bosom. But who ever inhaled the perfume of a flower without taking away a little of the silky down that covers it? And if we could change the colours that ornament it into perfumes, who would not mix them pitilessly with the fresh odour it exhales, to draw entirely into oneself the blossom that we can possess much better with a breath than with a look?

This law governing all creatures reached them in the Elysian existence which sentiment had built up. A fresh grain of sand fell to the bottom of the marvellous cup from which they were quaffing the fire of the stars, and, as it always happens, this speck of earth, mingling with all the delights of heaven, made these joys greater still. Our first voluptuousness is the most complete moment of happiness, for then the whole of the manly being is enthralled. It is then we feel the first shudder of some other substance than that of our soul; the first bound of the flesh, like the child as yet unformed in the womb of such immaculate love, and which, without leaving it, nevertheless lets us know that it is endowed with life. This golden ray not only lights up our souls; it penetrates to the depths of our worthless bodies, and makes them divine;

but, alas! we are no longer pure when its light fades. Amidst the sentiments of the man and the woman, mysticism is only possible for a moment, and if it lasts it is a lie.

"My friend," said Camilla one day to him whom she had so long called her brother, "at present mother is in the way. We are not alone often enough, and we are forced to hide too much what we have to say to each other."

Allan was of the same opinion, but it was impossible for them to get rid of Madame de Scudemor. Spring, which each day crept gradually nearer, would, they hoped, give greater liberty. Would it not be the pretext for many walks? And when they were supposed to be in different directions, would they not be able to meet, protected, as they would be, by the trees of the garden? But in the meanwhile they were obliged to put up with the exchange of a few tender words on the sly, and keep back their tears of joy and the love that oppressed them. It was difficult; it seemed as if their young organs would burst. At any rate, they resolved to write everything to each other that they had not been able to say during the day. A very fine copy of Burns, Allan's favourite poet, was the spot where they placed their correspondence.

This book was in the library, where Madame de Scudemor never went.

This slight compensation made their lives easy for some little time. They were either very crazy or quite sublime, but they were still brother and sister. On the part of Allan there was pure mystical love—the finest poem that imagination could sing in his heart; with Camilla, it was the virgin's ignorance of her first thoughts of love. Although she possessed that dangerous sort of beauty which, when looked upon, causes a thrill—the beauty of the Amazon foreshadowing resistance even when conquered, and whom one would not hesitate to crush at such a juncture; although her person exhaled the voluptuous odour of the most burning plants of Peru, as if some warm perfume of heliotrope had been hidden among her clothes, Allan had never looked upon her otherwise than with the expression of virginal feelings, although with some exaltation. Incessantly by her side, for days he rested his eyes on her bust, made for all the embraces and enlacements of love; upon her sloping shoulders and her intoxicating neck, where on the nape there were little curling locks, rebellious to the comb, and which, like golden moss, reminded one that her head in childhood, now of bronze hue,

had been auburn; and never had he felt upon his lips the moisture and the dryness of desire. He saw life dilating in double fruit within her bodice, showing the harmony of two celestial globes in a firmament of springtime, and he only experienced the feeling that comes over us at the sight of a fresh and sweet lake, after a day's tramp on a dry and dusty road, burnt up by ardent sunlight. Camilla, on her side, had supported for hours the breath of the man against her cheek, and it had not caused her to be covered with that fiery perspiration which breaks out all over us from head to foot at the slightest breath of the loved mouth. She had not even shuddered at it. Truly, she had often told him that he was handsome, with accents of idolatry. But do not mothers speak thus to their children?

Camilla and Allan, who did not leave each other during the day, could only write at night. Their letters were long, and made them sit up until the morning. Was it this continual sleeplessness that had so deeply fatigued Camilla's eyes? A violet circle surrounded them. One might have said that a summer sun lit up a mass of dark clouds. For anybody who might have observed her, she was more downcast than sad. She possessed the

double lassitude of happiness and innocence, and of these two fatigued states the greatest at this moment was not that of happiness.

One evening they were alone, by one of those chances that now and then happened favourably for them. It was about the close of winter, and out of doors the light was striking because of the transparency of the atmosphere in frosty weather. In the extremely light blue sky the stars, which seemed more small than usual, sparkled also whiter and sharper than at ordinary times. The thin moon showed a diaphanous semi-circle, like the half of a broken bracelet. The marsh, still inundated with the overflow of the Douve, which was gradually retiring, reflected the calmness of the sky; and the willows, whose straight branches resembled a woman's hair uplifted by the wind, were covered with hoar frost and a thousand capricious crystals. It was a fantastical landscape, seen through the vapoury veil that the heat of the drawing-room caused to fall upon the window-panes, and which is the gaiety of white frosts—a sort of wintry smile—when the air is rarefied and sonorous.

"Are you not ill?" asked Allan of the young girl. "For the last few days I find that you are changed and sad. What ails you, sister?"

"Nothing. I am not ill—physically, at least," she returned, with a slow and grateful smile. "But——"

"But?" interrupted Allan.

"But, as you say, I feel downhearted. I languish because I love you, and I would wish to live by my affection for you."

They clasped hands. All four were burning.

"Oh, Allan!" she said, lifting up to him her great black eyes, fatigued but ardent, like spheres of flames in their shaded orbits, "why, then, am I sad as you are, when you said that I was born to be happy? Truly, I begin to think that my heart is too small for so much happiness. Some great devotion would relieve me."

"Only death would bring us relief," said Allan; but she did not see the sense of those words. "Will you die with me, Camilla, since we can no longer bear the weight of our happiness?"

What an admirable thing is love! Here was this child, smiling sweetly at the thought of death, as if she were laughing at some young girlish friend.

"To die? Yes, for you, but not with you!" she said. "Oh, yes, to die for you, that I desire! Allan, you have found what I want!"

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"Why not together, my darling sister?" he asked.

"Because," she replied, unwittingly flashing a mighty light upon the poor human heart, "because to die together is not devotion; because we should have to begin everything all over again if there is love on the other side of the grave. Oh, my friend, it is not repose that I thirst for, but abnegation."

She remained still for some time, as if reflecting, and so did Allan. And these loving children were as grave as old people. Love had just led their thoughts as far as it could towards the infinite. But by bitter derision of fate, they suddenly returned to life from the borders of eternity. It was a deep fall, showing what a poor thing is the human soul, since its wings fail it so soon, and from out of the purest of its dreams whence it carried its wounded breast, the divine bird is bound to drop down once more.

Hands joined, thus they remained, saying not a word; she, with her elbows on her knees, in front of him, her face changed by the anxiety of too great joy and love. The traces of insomnia that furrowed her features; her haggard eyes; her languid smile; her whole being burnt up by the

inward flame; and, above all, this desire of sacrifice; the wish to die for him in the midst of the deepest joy which caused all her sufferings, made her more beautiful than a martyr. How must she have seemed then to him who had cleansed himself from the taint of his first caresses in meditative thought and with the shame of fleshly love; to him, her brother, her life, her soul, who found a pardon for his love in himself, and felt hopeful in the future because of the purity of the affection he felt for her? How did she seem to him who, not suspecting that any more happiness existed for her, had just proposed to him so simply to die? At this moment, even for anybody else than Allan, Camilla shone out a thousand times more beautiful by the soul than by corporeal beauty; but for him, who above all adored her soul through the bodily beauty that it increased tenfold, was not Camilla bound to be a sacred and religious object?

That is what it should have been, but it was not to be. Shall we therefore curse human nature? Let all tender souls, who think themselves pure, close this book here, and never open it again!

The breath of our couple, which had so often passed over their candid brows, only leaving behind the fleeting, evaporated, cool sensation, now

was felt upon their faces. That of Camilla, generally as healthy and fresh as May dew on a lily, was now as if bitter, and it was burning and sickly. Women, who are irony incarnate, during their mysterious days of suffering that are ever returning, but which are ephemeral, when they desire nothing of love but an arm on which to chastely lean, have breath without purity which makes our heart grow tender, and sends a thrill through our being. Camilla drew a long, sighing breath, and her mouth was half open. Its two corners were drowned in savoury moisture, the imperceptible foam of the waves of the heart left in the folds of a smile. Allan began to shudder at the touch of this breath, hot and cold in turn, like peppermint, but impregnated with fever and some unknown and nameless odour, which it was impossible to inhale. The blood beat in his veins, but that perhaps was the ecstasy of the heart. He kept leaning a little more towards her, and she, in dumb contemplation, inclined herself towards him in turn, as if to mingle their thoughts in some fraternal and modest kiss, full of the holy security of the feelings that swayed them.

From these four united hands two, however, set themselves free; one enlaced Camilla's bodice, and

the other, more slowly, placed itself around Allan's neck. Between their four lips there scarcely remained the soft interval of those of Camilla, when seen in profile, on a light background like that of the window. The atom of air that separated them was soon swallowed up. For the first time, their kiss lasted above the time necessary for scarcely felt contact. It was no longer like two rose leaves touching vaguely in space, thrown against each other by the morning breeze. That day there was more dew than usual, and they remained glued one unto the other. In vain Camilla resisted beneath the more intoxicated pressure of Allan. He was seeking at the source for the virginal nectar of which he had exhausted the light foam on the edge of the cup. It was naught but a kiss, but mysteriously voluptuous, for only the half of it was visible; but it was one of those kisses that plunges a dart into the heart that can never more be torn from it.

Where was now the sister? What had become of the brother? The glorious mystical love expired with the ravishing ignorance of the young woman. Was it thus that *she* was to quench her noble thirst for sacrifice? Was it thus that *he* thought of the happiness there would be in death?

again, while I was all full of emotion at this new phase of our love that had just commenced; when I had to hold my tongue, to stifle my feelings, to repress every shudder that shook me, I trembled as I thought I should not be strong enough. I thought my heart was breaking. Involuntarily I pressed my two hands upon it in the dark; and do you think, friend, that I was able to calm my inward agitation all the evening? You were able to chat with mother. But you are a man. I could only hold my tongue, and I dared not look at you.

"I only felt relieved when I was in my room. There, at least, I could give way without witnesses to the impetuosity of my remembrances. When I tell you, Allan, that I am crazy, I make no mistake. I threw myself on my bed as if I was throwing myself into your arms. On my pillow I found traces of the perfume of my hair. Would you believe that to breathe that faint odour, which is mine, and which I find there every night, threw me into a state of inconceivable languor? I was obliged to drag myself off the bed, so as not to faint away, and I went and leant out of the window. It was cold. The stars darted their sharp points in the penetrating air. Well, I felt nothing

of that bitter night; and yet I was bareheaded, without boa or shawl, and my dress was unhooked. With delight I revelled in the wintry weather, which had always made me sad to contemplate. I enjoyed it like a spring evening. Oh, my friend, what power have you then over Camilla, to thus change everything around me, and in me?

"For a long time I remained with my eyes fixed upon the window of your room, where I could see a light. I thought that you were then writing to me, and that idea made me interrupt my reverie to go and write to you also that I love you; for what is in my heart I never could confide to you, oh, my tender friend! Try and guess it, if you can. But, alas! I was too full of emotion. It was impossible for me to write to you. I could not do so, even to tell you that I love you. Oh, Allan, was it thus with you? Did you pass the night like me, half dead, because life and love brimmed over in torrents from your heart?

"And this morning, as I am less moved, and have found strength enough to write to you, shall I tell you about my long, delicious and killing insomnia, and how the night passed, my forehead leaning against the bed, repeating your adored name? Oh! had you been there, Allan, you would

not have added one touch more of insanity to all my delirium. Your lips would not have covered my shoulders with more intoxicating kisses than those that covered them from my own mouth. Why does a burning blush mount to my brow in writing to you what would have been nothing but child's play if my lips had not been touched by yours, and if that caress from myself to myself had not been all impregnated still with you!

"Oh, Allan! I loved you as if you were my brother. Now it is no longer like a brother that I love you, but like him to whom one yields up one's life, like him I should have imagined if I had not always known him. From your sister, that I was yesterday, I have become your betrothed; never, I swear it, Allan, shall I belong to anybody else than you! Only let me beg of you, friend, not to ask my mother for me directly. She will be happy to give her daughter to him who is already her adopted son, but do not let us hasten to exhaust that life of which one drop now suffices to make us happy. Do you know that your lips frighten me, Allan? They say that marriage prevents lasting love. That is absurd; for being your wife, I should only love you more and more. But

show me the poor, loving lass who dares to say that she will not always be loved?

"With what joy I shall meet you again, my dear Allan! I count the hours that separate me from you. There are long, white bands on the horizon. It is gradually getting lighter and lighter. By the gleam of daybreak I write you these concluding lines. Yesterday, I seemed to you as if suffering and downcast. You explained to me your sweet uneasiness. To-day, if I am paler and more wan, my beloved, be not anxious. To your heart I confide the secret of my pallor and my night. Just this minute I looked at myself in the glass. My eyes are inflamed, and my cheeks are livid, but it seems to me it can be seen in my tired features that it is not suffering that has changed them; and you, Allan, will not be deceived!"

Allan was not astonished at this letter. He no longer was ignorant of what a furnace of passion smouldered in Camilla's heart. The fear he had felt at the first letter received from her did not trouble him now. The greatest cowards finish by not trembling any more. By looking for a long time at a danger that seems frightful at first, the soul becomes tranquil. But do not fancy that it is

stronger; it is weaker than ever. To be afraid is to be active still, and passivity is the last step in degradation. Camilla's letter threw Allan into a state of consternation.

His pure happiness at being loved by her had expired in the first sensuality of caresses. What was for Camilla the era of a new life had been cruel deception for him. He recognised that he had made a mistake. He had imagined that he could live by her side as if she was his sister; that his love would be as a sanctuary where the emotions of Camilla's passionate nature would be purified. He fancied he could be to her what he had always been. Poor dupe! he could only laugh like guilty people at the comedy they play to themselves, and by the aid of which they put their scruples to sleep.

And, in fact, it was not even her, whose ardour he feared, who had led him astray. He had not even that weak excuse to make to himself. He thought he had lifted his soul above the reach of vulgar love.

"That child is only very innocent," he thought, "but I am truly guilty, for I possess all the knowledge she lacks."

Nevertheless, they had met each other half way

in a kiss. He had despised himself during his love with Yseult; now the same abominable scorn seized him again. The sufferings that this self-disdain had made him endure were trifling in comparison with what awaited him henceforward. May he not betray himself, and show his hidden grief and pain! But rendered cowardly by his love for her, he dared not take one of those decisive resolutions that might have saved him from the rapacious scorn that he foresaw. He covered up the depth of his egotism from his own eyes, and hid the desire he felt of seeing Camilla beneath the fears of his love for her, perhaps by exaggerating them.

"If I were to leave her, she would kill herself," he murmured inwardly, and he remained.

As for the future, he steeled himself against its approach.

He asked himself, with continually increasing anxiety, what would become of him with this mistaken love, which he had long fancied was tender, fraternal friendship? How was he to make the avowal of his love for Camilla to her mother, whom he had loved, and who had given herself to him out of pity, the only feeling that was left in her great soul? Yseult's face rose up now in

his thoughts by the side of that of Camilla, and frightened him, and he had to hide this fear from the daughter so as not to dishonour her mother in her eyes. This was a fearful effort in the presence of the girl drunk with love, but whose intoxication he could no longer share. Too much fear and shame were mingled therein. The days passed, deepening this new suffering which he hid beneath a brazen, lying brow.

Is it not unheard of pain to lie to the woman one loves; not to be able to tear away one's soul from triple mendacious bands, to lay it bare beneath her glance; to be alone with the hidden vulture of thought even in the arms of one's beloved? This pain was so sharp and tenacious for unfortunate Allan, that the love and caresses of Camilla could only deaden it momentarily. But when his looks reflected something of it, she imagined that his sadness came from his black and suspicious nature, as he had told her, and she was surprised that his disposition resisted the obstinate clinging of her kisses.

But in her joy this was but a passing cloud that the slightest breath carried away. She found it was greater and more beautiful to be sad. He became a model of sombre and virile poetry, which

pleased her girlish imagination, as all contrasts would, and excited her passionate, sensual outbursts. That is one of the delusions of pain. But Camilla had no idea at what price her lover bought it. God had opened the treasure of His mercy for that child. And you who have not received as much, can you not see that, if she became a prey to misfortune later, she could not ascribe it to His injustice?

Camilla did not know herself which was the sweetest; the future that opened itself out, her hopes, or the delights of the present moment in which she was revelling. Not only did her love seem eternal, which was audacious but permissible, for there were no appearances that this happiness should not be so; but she gathered in her heart all the felicity that a woman can promise herself, feeling that she is loved. Since the day they had found they were more than brother and sister, Allan loved her more than ever. Even when most sad and discouraged he never ceased to show his affection. It appeared as if he wished to forget the dark shades of his thoughts in the multitude of his caresses. And never did he implore them more of her than in those moments when she spoke to him of the future, and when, with her voice

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lives. They no longer said: "This is delicious!" but: "This is necessary!" They were grave, almost pensive. Camilla being no longer astonished at anything, but thirsting for happiness still, by the furious inconsistency of irritated passion; for she knew that she had descended as far down into the gulf of life as she could go, while Allan was no less eager and as thirsty as she was for the beverage that has always the same taste and produces the same thirst! Thus for them love was without contemplation or smiles. It was the moment when passion gets to be something savage, when it bites the breast like a tigress or burns up its own happiness. Less is said by the lovers—they know each other—they kiss lengthily, in silence; and then turn away without asking what each feels. And the two mouths, ever silent, eternally cemented, nevertheless return one to the other.

When passion has reached this moment of its duration, it becomes a central point of which the circumference becomes narrower every day. It throws no more charm on exterior life. It absorbs everything involuntarily. It is a burning, jealous, and angry possession. There is as yet no storm declared, but the sky is full of fire burning up the earth. The dew of the heart, the tears of early ten-

derness are all exhausted; and when later fresh tears come to moisten our aridity, they resemble the great drops that in summer showers give out an odour of dust as they fall.

So it was that the season of spring, whose influence was no longer in their souls, in vain spread its thousand beauties around them. What caused life to mount in the trees made nothing rise in their hearts. But passion was developed all the same! First of all it is a joy that kills, but which seems to bring fresh life. And then afterwards it is no longer the same, and it is not yet grief and pain. It is a nameless zone between hope and regret, between happiness and nothingness, a strange empty space which one traverses with mutual love, but which chokes us! A wearisome moment when one is certain of being loved, and is yet powerless to be happy, without the why and wherefore of this incomprehensible fact ever appearing clear to our confused spirit!

No one would have recognised in Camilla that bacchante of loving happiness who with loud cries rushed towards every intoxication. She was almost as sad as Allan. Her face had lost its brilliancy. Burning blushes or deep pallor overwhelmed her every minute, forming a stormy picture of the

anxieties of her heart. In vain nature was beneficent and smiling; in vain, with the roses growing thickly around them and their brows bathed in perfumed light, they wandered vaguely, forgetfully strolling; the happiness enjoyed by all created beings expired at their feet without stirring them. And they loved each other! Their young breasts contained more love than was scattered on the ground in each germ to which God sent life in the rays of His sun. But what caused the palpitation of the atoms brought no intoxication to His creatures. They were miserable beings, who by pressing against each other could only utter a cry that proclaimed the impossibility of being happy. In vain they enlaced each other in such a manner that the trace of the lover's breast remained on the bosom of the mistress, they knew that they would find no more peace than delirious joy in these fatal and useless embraces. Their caresses were more violent than ever, but it was hurtful to see them; for they were as irritating and sad as they were themselves.

To this pain, inherent to passion itself, Allan joined a multitude of others with poetry or dignity. He blushed to the bottom of his soul at every thought of the position in which he found himself

with regard to Camilla. Some of her words crushed him. At present she desired something irrevocable between them, as if she had the instinct that their passion should be clung to or it would escape. She begged him to confess their mutual love to Madame de Scudemor, and ask her to ratify their engagement, as they had sworn to be as one in giving themselves to each other. At these prayers, Allan—who would not understand him?—hesitated and stammered. The incoherence of his replies would have betrayed his embarrassment and his torments to any one else but this young girl, who supposed that he possessed as she did the pudicity of his passion and repugnance to ask of a third party, as a favour, the rights they had exchanged. The man had nothing strong about him but his mind, and that was what made him suffer. If he had had less intellect, he would not have understood so well what vacillation and treachery he was guilty of towards Camilla and her mother. It was patent that he was unworthily deceiving them both. Passion was full of wrongdoing, no doubt, but true, just, noble ideas stood as obstacles to the lust that swayed him, to show him that he ought to have resisted more courageously. When the untamed steed that gallops over everything—Passion

—has found no limit or stoppage in the resistance of the mind, the intellect, trampled underfoot, rises up again, relights the smoking flame of its torch and pitilessly flourishes it near the conscience, until that becomes a furnace in which perishes all that there exists of moral beauty in man.

This was rigorously true for Allan. An idea that came to him at this juncture, and which he had great trouble to get rid of, shows to what degree the egotism of his passion had caused him to withdraw within himself. He found himself with a monstrous desire for the death of Camilla's mother. The sufferings that showed in her whole bearing, the change wrought in her lineaments, all fed this wish, vague at first, and soon quite precise, reminding him that if this woman was dead, his position would be simplified, and a gravestone intervening, the past could not escape from beneath it. It was a frightful and inextinguishable desire, ever followed by remorse which was all the more heartrending as his incorruptible, intellectual vision did not fail him. This desire and remorse, yoked in his soul like double torture, struggled together, both resisting each other.

Camilla knew nothing of this pain. She only suffered from the impotency of sensuality, which

always yields less than it promises. For a mind like hers, humane, complete, and strongly attached to reality, this passion having become solidly fixed, often threw her into a sort of sombre madness. Sometimes she said strange things to Allan. She asked him why he was not really her brother. In certain moments she called herself his incestuous sister. It seemed as if by this word, beneath which all worldly legislation has placed felonious guilt, she spurred him on to fresh transports. When lust has naught to ennoble it, it causes dreams of crime. Perhaps, in the world of malefactors, there is in the thought of lawbreaking some secret connection with the idea of happiness?

One of the results of this situation in the duration of sentiment is that it makes it exacting, and full of bitterness and suspicion. These exigencies are not outspoken, it is true; these suspicions are attributed to fate. This bitterness does not leave the heart to appear on the lips, but it exists. It is a solitary ulceration of selfishness, which finishes by invading all our devotional strength. Let the slightest circumstance touch lightly upon one of these silent suspicions, the soul lives in such a suffering and grievous state that it is immediately upset by it. What one did not inwardly confess,

each talks about together. Actual life is modified. One or two leaves more fall from the already bare tree. Both love each other still—always; but either jealousy, or a reproach, or uneasiness, cuts, as with an axe, this living affection which always finds a way to again join together the severed and ensanguined fragments. Passion has been compared to the pyramid of the Arabic tales, of which the steps crumble away as soon as mounted. Alas! it is rather as one descends that they fall to pieces, so that it is not the descent, but to mount again, that is impossible.

The circumstance that changes our language by altering our soul a little soon took place. Everything drives a human being to rush towards facts. There are in us griefs, wrongs, and faults ready to burst forth at any moment. That soon occurred for Allan and Camilla. It was but a word, but that suffices when the soul, saturated with the irritations of lust, has no more shame for its egotism, and abjures its generous delicacy. Do they not say that a timid touch of the finger caused a body struck by lightning to crumble into dust?

They had passed the day in the garden, and as there are moments when some unknown inward breeze refreshes the inflamed soul, they were less

sad and more relieved from the burden of passion and life. Madame de Scudemor had joined them in the afternoon. Fatigued by a walk that had been too prolonged for her, she had returned to the Château a long while before the tepid April sun had lost its warmth as it drew down to the horizon. During this stroll, she had shown touches of calm amiability that acted on the two young people, so exclusively occupied with each other. As the view of a person of even disposition sometimes soothes the turbulence of our soul, so had the sweet tranquillity of Madame de Scudemor brought some appeasing contagion to their stormy thoughts. Who knows? But when she had left them, they spoke for some time about her. Allan especially, as he felt he had done wrong to the woman he neglected. We often think we make amends when, during their absence, we are just towards those who have fault to find with us. As Allan could not reveal what he knew about Yseult, great and unfortunate creature, he could only insist upon what appertained to her exterior. He did so with his lover's memories and the melancholy of his imagination which he possessed in a supreme degree, and which Yseult's age, her lost beauty, and her suffering redoubled. They were seated on that bench of the

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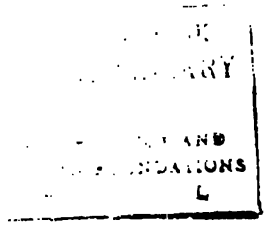
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"Are you mad?" he asked, in fright.

"Yes!" she exclaimed, "for I am jealous. Formerly I thought you loved my mother, and just now your caress, Allan, seemed full of her memory. Oh, if you are going to love me because I remind you of her! Am I to stand as model for my mother?"

And she was fearful to look upon. Her jealous thought, which had so rankled in her childish breast, and that love, and the joy of being loved, had smothered before she could give vent to it, showed itself on her expressive features with savage energy. Allan, to calm her, had recourse to imposture. He had to lie again. Always to lie! How tired he was of lying! But he deceived her yet once more, giving way to the instinct of fear or duty, alas! such as lust prescribes. He overwhelmed her with tenderness, and in his arms she cheated herself deliciously. She grew calm again at the sound of the dear voice, and the end of this day, from threatening as it was, became sweeter than all the other evenings had been for a long while. As she was entirely reassured, she showed the coquetry of jealousy. She made much of her wounded eye. The scratch was on the eyelid, but she would not let Allan's handkerchief hide the

wound of which she was so vain. She would only allow her lover to wipe away the trace of blood with his lips. With his kisses he dressed her wound. But through those with which she paid him back she did not perceive all the pain she caused him. She told him of her past life.

"Oh! look you, my Allan," said she, "I was jealous before knowing what jealousy was, before I knew that I loved you. Do you remember one evening when my mother said to you: 'Go and wait for me in the copse'? I overheard her, and some unknown feeling took possession of me. The idea that she might be in love with you, the thought that you could love her, did not strike me. Oh, no, I was too innocent! But I suffered from a pain that had no name for me. For some time my life was troubled. Pardon me, Allan, for never having told you this. I was false to you, whom I loved like a brother. I hated my mother, because you no longer loved your sister, because you had become rough and cold, you so good and affectionate. Why? I did not know. I would have given anything, and done everything, to have guessed what it all meant. Would you believe that I used at that time to pass sleepless nights? Don't you know that I spied upon you both? I listened

at doors when you were alone, mother and you. In vain I told myself that I was doing evil; a stronger power than shame and pride forced me to keep on. But I never got to hear anything that taught me jealousy was boiling in my breast. I found that out afterwards. Oh, tell me, repeat to me, Allan, that you have never loved her!"

And he assured her he had not, and he swore it to her, and he did not dare look upon the young girl, so clumsy was he in deceiving her, for she seemed still to be a prey to jealousy, although she assured him she was so no longer.

When they separated, Allan drew a long breath, and freed his stifled heart. When, feeling secret joy, one leaves the loved woman, what has become of the love one has felt for her? Is it not a frightful discovery to feel one's self relieved by her absence, happier alone than with *her*? Camilla had just thrown a formidable light on the past and the future, but which was not unforeseen.

Allan found himself placed between his conscience and Camilla, and she formed a new conscience in herself as implacable as the first. Up to now, Camilla's love had been a refuge for him against himself. Now, where was the refuge, since she also turned against him?

It has been said, and rightly, too, that all deep feeling is exclusive, and consequently jealous, and yet women who want to be the most adored swoon with fright when it is shown to them that this can only be by calling down upon themselves the most disturbing jealousy. Why, then, this wish for love and the fear of it in these beings, who seem full of contradictions, and who escape us by their versatility much more than by their profundity? It is because women, whatever they may say in the mistakes of their tenderness, or affirm in the hypocrisy of their vanity, yearn more for happiness than for love. Love, for them, is the means; to be happy is the end. Thus, when they are afraid of jealousy, which is the essence of love itself, their instinct is not at fault. They feel that love in all its plenitude is too easily changed into anguish, and it is of happiness that they have dreamt.

Men, whose sensibility is less, and whose desires of happiness are not so imperious, understand as well as women what jealousy is: the stumbling-block of happiness in intimacy; the limit of love, after the first step. Imaginative folk, worshipping power, may extol it as the expression of a great sentiment, but it is none the less certain that jealousy destroys love; and, sad thought! perhaps be-

cause it spoils and annihilates the happiness of which all humanity is greedy. One may possess the intrepid fatuity which causes a desire for the dagger, but we must believe that love must always finish by dying out when these jealousies step in. The first scene, the first suspicion, the first reproach, are almost always incurable evils, a deep burn which only hurts the surface of the skin, but which in time ploughs its way down into the flesh.

Therefore, Camilla's love for Allan had just said good-bye to happiness in this jealous and angry avowal. Although she had found peace once more in the confidence and illusion of a feeling that was still eloquent, because it was true, nevertheless her jealousy was only slumbering. Both for Camilla's sake and his own, Allan would have to take care not to awaken it. So it was that all freedom between them was no longer possible, and if there had been confidence so far, from that day forward it would cease to exist. They had loved without being initiated in all each other's thoughts. It was a singular love, poisoned at its source; for when confidence is gone, lust is still present, but what remains for love?

If Allan had never been the lover of Madame

de Scudemor, the jealousy of which he was the victim would have none the less eaten away the love he felt for Camilla—a vase of vinegar, in which the pearls of Cleopatra were dissolved; all the heart's riches spent more slowly, and more miserably lost than in the sumptuous extravagance of a single evening. Little by little, jealousy carries away all charms of intimacy. To-day one goes. To-morrow, another. All tends to isolation instead of drawing the couple nearer. It is not Othello's stifling pillow. It is a torture resembling it, but less prompt. A shriek is uttered, which one oft-times only partly hears. Reconciliations get worn out by repetition, and by this impotent pressure it is not Desdemona who finishes by dying, but the love itself. Allan had not foreseen this issue to his passion, but he dimly perceived that some new change was about to follow the metamorphoses that his love had already undergone. By dissimulating, so as to keep suspicion asleep, he crushed his love by fatiguing it; and when, wishing for repose after his countless efforts, he began to fly from Camilla although he loved her, he soon saw that such conduct could only increase her jealousy, and he returned to her, uncertain of himself, beginning to curse lust and its consequences because

its intoxication is not eternal. Kisses even had lost their virtue of oblivion. They did not prevent him from thinking. He had found once more the power of meditation born of uneasiness, and which diminishes love. When once again he plunged into mad caresses, he was too preoccupied for them to disturb him, and too unhappy to enjoy them; but he bestowed them with calculation. Even while they lasted, anxiety did not loose its prey. It was obstinate worry, not arising from some unknown future circumstance, but weighing on every moment of the actual duration of his love. Indeed, every hour which did not bring about the explosion of the climax in this existence of three beings at the Château of the Willows was only a chance reprieve, on which it would have been madnss to rely for the dread hour that would follow the end.

XI.

The state of Madame de Scudemor's health daily gave rise to more and more anxiety. It seemed as if some unknown malady was devouring her, as if life was slowly going from her. Already the torrent showed the rocky depths of the ravine. How long would it be before it was entirely dried up? When one looked at her livid face, where the eyes, with their thousand rays of light, slowly dying out, had retained only one morbid spark in the centre of their deep blackness, it was easy to see some other imprint than that of old age—the touch of some hand none the less inexorable, some work more rapid than that of time. Had death, that was taking possession of her, after having killed one affection after another, and so soon; that had left her standing, and physically alive, after having destroyed her morally—had it returned to place the body on a level with her soul? It was a marvellous piece of work to contemplate! But who noticed it at the Château of the Willows? She did not complain; there was no weariness in

the wrinkles that furrowed her brow. And besides, could Camilla and Allan see aught but what was passing in themselves? Had they not enough of those preoccupations which are all the more exclusive because they are so painful? When home life is tender and sweet it has a power of concentration; but when it is twisted falsely, spoilt, wasted, lost, it soon palls upon us. Every miserable detail, each petty pain, becomes so great that we can see nothing else. Does man shrink into littleness becaue he moves in so small a circle? For the drop of water, when suffering is in question, is mayhap as vast as the ocean's infinity.

But if Allan and Camilla, occupied with themselves, did not remark the weakness of Madame de Scudemor, she had not the same reasons for not seeing the sadness of her daughter much better than she had noted her happiness. She was an unfortunate woman, who was bound to learn the lessons of grief, because she was accustomed to always find lust and pain hand in hand. The unhappy creature had been put off the scent, in spite of her great intelligence, by the aspect of the happiness she had never tasted.

Camilla was sad indeed. She no longer possessed that serious bearing beneath which she had

formerly veiled her first sufferings. There was no mistake to be made; it was true sadness. Grief claimed Camilla. Even her health was changed—reaction of the soul upon the body. Ephemeral confidence faded away, and dark suspicion took its place, without ever leaving her. As Allan showed himself of irregular disposition with her—nothing acting so capriciously as passion, as, after having left her for hours, he came precipitately to her side, where he remained, dull and dumb—she had greatly wept at this unequal behaviour; and then her jealousy absorbed her again. Each day brought fresh suspicion or some new scene. She was too much in love now not to be proud. She felt herself capable of every meanness, and loved even to abasement. She adored Allan with the abandonment of every other feeling that had nothing to do with her love. Thus she persecuted him with her grievances; she tired him out, as by an eternal and invariable repetition, which she kept on with always when she had been interrupted. Allan began by drinking her tears to dry them; but the source was inexhaustible, and he concluded by finding them very bitter. Sometimes he wiped them from his lips with words full of bitterness and injustice, as if poison had been poured in an

open wound. And this was a bad way to cure the lass's suffering soul. Besides, there are words that are irrevocable facts. There is no pardon or redemption for them; there is no possibility of forgetting them either after having said them or listened to them. On top of them we put some kind of reconciliation; smiles are born again of kisses which cause transports of delight when, heart beating against heart, the terrible words spoken in a moment of ill-humour resound still in our breast. Often, seeming to hear them in our sleep, we start up suddenly in our bed and see our companion, who also is not asleep, but who is thinking of the very thing that had woke you. "Do you love me?" is asked again. There is enough love left to make us ask and repeat the question, but the sentence has lost its intoxicating meaning since the day it was no longer useless.

Thus, after having suffered in the solitude of their souls from the feeling they had for each other, Allan and Camilla made themselves unhappy by this very sentiment; they were egotists, for whom intimacy was the grindstone upon which they sharpened the poniards with which they were about to strike each other.

Camilla irritated Allan all the more because each

word that she uttered to appease her suspicions and her jealousy made him more guilty and vile in his own estimation. He knew what it was to be jealous of the past. He had been through that, but not enough to have pity on that suffering in another, especially when that feeling was endured in corroding silence, but became exacting with the despotism of love that thinks itself offended. For a man who was poetical if ever there was one, jealousy had no more picturesque fits of rage. Camilla's tears were only absurd, just as if all tears were not so! He even took no animated, breathless interest at the sight of her brilliant youth withering away in tears. The pitiless and used-up poet was unmoved by her grief. Such love was lowered into mere "nagging." He was killing her by inches, and took no interest in her.

Nevertheless, he loved her; it was a fact that he loved her still. Willingly would he have shown her the greatest devotion. For her he would have sacrificed all he held most dear, if it had not been her. But he loved her as we all love, with the peculiarities of his organisation and his thoughts. Although he loved her, he could not help judging her, and as, for men of Allan's stamp, who conquer reality by the conceptions of their intellect,

all women lose in the solitary comparisons that these too ambitious intelligences incessantly make, he found that she was below the standard he had imagined. We are young, or infatuated, but sooner or later the habit of the mind gets the upper hand again. It is even doubtful whether we ever lose it completely. On the other hand, perhaps only two vulgar beings can love each other for long; perhaps superiority, of whatever kind it may be, is an hermaphroditic state, powerless to give or receive love. There is an accouplement among eagles, and that is why, perchance, they ought not to have been chosen to symbolise genius.

Certainly, Camilla was right to complain of Allan. She it was who, in the early period of the discovery of their love, had said to him:

"Let us wait, and live as we are living now. We are always sure of marriage. We are so happy in the mystery of our love!"

But now she was in a hurry, and no longer happy in this concealment. She wanted her felicity brought out into the light. She desired the marriage bonds, which seemed to her unbreakable, and she pressed Allan to ask her of her mother. Allan, who had loved Madame de Scudemor, and felt upon his shoulders the crushing embarrassment of the

past with her whose daughter he now adored, replied to the ardent and continually multiplied demands of Camilla by paltry incomprehensible evasions. It was quite enough to make anybody uneasy. To escape from this prayerful persecution Allan was at a loss what to do. There was only left the resource of a weak mind, always retreating in the face of danger, although the peril be inevitable. He put off everything until the morrow. This faint-heartedness seemed to give right to Camilla in spite of the most obstinate denegations. And Allan's position was such a cruel one, when he was alone with the young girl who was not in the wrong when she showed herself to be exacting, that he wished for Madame de Scudemor to step in between them to spare him this torture.

But events were not favourable for him. Madame de Scudemor hardly ever left her room until noonday. As she always refused the kind offices of her daughter, half the day was passed by Camilla in the garden or the drawing-room, alone, or with Allan. The servants of the Château were not surprised at the intimacy of the two young people who had always lived together, and between whom there was nothing to make any one think that they were not brother and sister.

One morning, as Allan came down into the drawing-room, hoping Camilla would not be up at that hour, and he could go out alone for a walk in the country, he found her seated near the window where she was in the habit of working. A matutinal breeze, full of rosy light, came in through the open casement, and seemed to form a halo round her wan face, which at that moment was of the hue of the autumn-leaf hangings of the room. In this smiling morning radiance her features revealed the disorder of a restless night. Her dull eyes were swollen by sleeplessness. Allan started as he caught sight of her.

"You did not think to find me here, Allan?" she said, without rising from her chair, as he approached her and placed a kiss upon her brow. "Is that a kiss that means good-morning or good-bye?" she continued, with bitterness. "Come! give it me quickly, and then be off. Is not that what you want?"

"How sarcastic you are, Camilla!" answered Allan sadly. "Do you suppose that I wish to avoid you?"

"No! I do not think so." And her smile was more bitter than her words. "I am sure of it. I am in your way; I tire you; I bore you. You

have enough of me. Dare to deny it! Even if you do not know it yourself, or if you still have some illusion, I do not doubt the misfortune of my life. I reproach you with nothing; it is not your fault. But you love me no longer!"

"I love you no longer, Camilla?" returned Allan, as he seated himself by her side. "Tell me, do these insane suspicions still trouble your reason? Will you never tire of being unjust? I speak not of my life that you are rending, and of my love that you insult, but will you never take pity on yourself? Shall I always see you creating cruel and irreparable suffering for yourself? I love you no longer? How, then, do you desire to be loved? Then you are no more my Camilla, my sister, my betrothed, my wife? Look at me, cruel girl, and repeat to me that you are sure that I love you no more!"

She looked at him as he wished. There was so much love in her eyes. He was so moved in finding her so pale, and so horribly upset by the tears she had shed or kept back, that as she gazed at him Camilla forgot the sarcasms that had risen from her heart, being but innocuous bites made by the victim on the invulnerable heel that was crushing her.

"Oh! if you love me, why do you make me so unhappy?" she rejoined, with softer reproach.

It was the trivial sentence they all say; a universal cry that they all utter—these egotists of happiness who are called women. It is the groan of passion that bleeds. But alas! could not Allan have put the same question to her?

"My Camilla," replied Allan, "it is not I who make you unhappy, but yourself!" He dared not insist upon this assertion, for such a lie appalled him. "You know my sombre disposition. You know that my imagination always sees sadness in the future, and makes me doubt the present. Why, then, do you reproach me with avoiding you when I try to hide my sadness from you, sweet young creature, who, out of love for me, have become suspicious and ill, as if I had brought you in my kisses the contagion of the malady from which I know I have always suffered? Formerly, you did not bring up against me the efforts that I made to preserve you from this vile and putrid leprosy. Camilla, you used to say to me then, 'I will cure you of these suspicions!' You had accepted me as I was, and you still saw love in what you take to-day to be indifference. I have made a mistake. I have dragged you down to share my fate. I

have made you like myself. I have tarnished your happiness, and sullied every chance of felicity you possessed. I ought to have fled from you, and gone and died of my love far away from you! But again it was you who held me back; it was you who said to me, 'Stop with me, brother, and I will love thee!' And I remained, listening to nothing more, hearing nothing more than that intoxicating promise. But I stifled all in the love you had promised me. Why, then, are you less generous, my Camilla? Why do you accuse my love when I am only guilty of loving you too much?"

All in tears, she hearkened to him, but smiling as well. With one hand he had taken her round the waist, and with the other he held her by the shoulders.

"Oh, promise me," said he, with effusion, "promise me that you will never more be so absurdly unjust, and so make us both suffer. Promise me that you will never more spoil your darling face by your tears. Promise me never more to doubt him who adores you. Swear it on our love!"

"I will take any oath you like," she returned. "I believe you, my Allan, and I will never believe myself—never more! But in return, promise me never to lie in the future—never to have that look

of forced restraint when you are with your love. If you are sad, sombre, afflicted—what shall I say? —strange, and even unjust, oh, my friend, I beg of you, do not seek to hide it from me. I cannot live without you always by my side, always! And when you are there, and are silent, Allan, when you do not look at me, it seems to me that you are not there at all!"

"Yes, my Camilla," he replied; "yes, you shall be obeyed, my adored queen! Multiply your exacting demands," he added, "and I will take them as proofs of love."

Thus it was that he was mastered by her after having been her master.

"Well, then," she said, after the pause of a kiss on her lover's lips, "ask my hand from my mother this very day!"

He could not escape the importunate prayer. Rage, really more unjust than what he had so styled in the case of Camilla, took possession of him, but he held it silent in his heart.

"You say nothing!" she exclaimed. "You love me, and are dumb? Oh, Allan, I do not understand you! You have only to say one word and I should be your wife to-morrow, and I cannot tear that word from you! Yet you love me? There

is some undercurrent that confounds and tortures me!"

Indeed, such logic was unconquerable. There was no reply possible, or an avowal must have been made.

"Without a doubt I will ask your hand of your mother," said Allan, with insidious weakness. "But will you be more happy with my love than you are now? What do we risk if we wait a little longer?"

"And our child, can he wait?" she rejoined, in a low tone.

At these words, Allan became quite pale. With a look she saw the greenish cast upon her lover's features; and then she continued in a hoarse voice:

"Listen to me, Allan! You must go to-day to my mother and confess all. I will not wait a moment longer. Yesterday, when I was near her, she sadly interrogated me about my depression of spirits and the change in my face, with a glance that made me tremble. I was so confused that I do not know what I answered her. It seemed to me that her eyes never left my waistband. Ah! my friend, let us have done with this torment. My mother will pardon everything, and we shall be happy. Perhaps we have only ceased to be so be-

cause we hid from her that we loved each other. You smile! but I am superstitious since I have been suffering. Take pity, but go and see my mother. Go!"

"My child," insisted Allan, "your mother is ill, do you not fear to—"

"Ah! why this regard for her?" interrupted Camilla violently. "And I, Allan, do I not also suffer? Do you not love me more than my mother? And if there is one of us two who ought to be immolated for the other, why should it be me?"

This outcry of the offended woman was of such great vehemence, and imposed upon Allan so much, that he, although eloquent by nature, knew not what to reply to the young girl who domineered over him with the ascendancy of a true situation.

"But do you want me to believe that you do not love me?" she continued, with a despairing cry. "Oh! I pray you on my knees, go to my mother and tell her all! I will not leave your feet until you promise me that! Allan! Allan! just now you told me that I was your wife, but do you not see that you do not wish me to be legitimately yours! Then say to me: 'No! no! I do not love you!' That would be better. But do not leave me in this

frightful incertitude! Sooner kill me! Kick me, my child and me, far from you, both maimed, but do not tell me that you love me when you are torturing me! Kill me sooner—kill me!"

And with anguish she beat her head against his knees that she closely clasped.

Only men, degraded by the despair of a loved woman at their feet, can understand what Allan must have felt at seeing Camilla thus drag herself in the dust. Such is the cowardly prostitution of innocent grief which has sullied so many women; and the man, upstanding, shares their infamy. The tears that fall can never be shaken from the feet they moisten. Even the mouth of her who has shed them cannot wipe them away, and their indelible trace is carried like incorruptible mud in all the paths of life.

Allan lifted Camilla from the floor, and by sheer strength placed her upon the sofa.

"Insensate girl! How you hurt my feelings!" said he to her.

But she did not understand the heartrending accents of Allan; she saw naught therein but exasperating pity. The tears dried upon Camilla's cheeks like drops of water falling on red-hot iron. A woman of many contrasts, with a lip quivering

with rage, the blood rushed to her face and deepened its olive tint, as it swelled the arteries of the neck and forehead to bursting.

"He will not go!" she repeated several times, frenziedly. "You are but a coward, Allan! Your loving vows are perfidious! You have loved my mother, and perhaps you love her still, or you make her believe it as you do me! You do not dare ask the mother for her daughter when you have betrayed them both!"

Allan tried to take her in his arms, but she tore herself from him.

"Approach me not!" she shrieked with horror; "you smell of my mother! Oh, mother! cold and hypocritical creature, who could have thought it? You love her? Oh, how I hate her now! But do I not tell you to leave me, lover of my mother?" she reiterated, with increasing rage, as she escaped from his arms.

Never had Allan so suffered. Camilla's cries made him drunk with acute pain. One of those fits of anger came over him that seem strong enough to frighten the very fates that threaten us, when he heard the woman he loved call him a perjurer, and receive his caress with disgust. In spite of her efforts, he was about to seize the

weak and furious creature and crush her against his heart in a grip of despair and voluptuous anguish. But he stopped still, with outstretched hands, in most sublime hesitation. His glance at that moment had such power that a tiger would have retreated. She felt it on her face like the touch of a weapon.

"I swear to you, Camilla," he said to her, with a quiver in his voice, as one has when pale with rage withheld, "I swear to you, by the child you carry, to break my skull in your sight against yonder *console* if you refuse to listen to me!"

Anger is Aaron's rod. When it was changed into a serpent it devoured all the other reptiles.

Camilla, tamed, became dumb.

"I swear to you," continued Allan, "that I do not love your mother, but you alone, Camilla—you only! Only you—you!"

She bent her head, as if reflecting. Then, suddenly lifting it:

"I shall soon know," she said curtly, and she made as if to leave the room.

"Where are you going?" asked Allan.

"To see my mother," she answered.

"And what for, madwoman?"

He tried to hold her back, but she resisted, and broke away from him.

"To confess all and know all!" she said, turning round on the threshold of the door, and she went out of the room, leaving Allan petrified with astonishment and fright.

XII.

When Camilla entered her mother's room her mind was so agitated by the scene she had just had with Allan that she did not feel the timid emotion always caused by the presence of Madame de Scudemor. A violent fever of jealousy and curiosity had seized upon her soul, and instinctively drove her forward. Her will seemed to be involuntary. She was no longer the young girl of a moment since, whom Allan had found cast down through tears and insomnia, and who had writhed convulsively at his feet. She was a wounded woman with a wounded soul, who stalked to meet her fate, with the fear and hate that destiny always inspires. She breathed quickly, almost imperceptibly. Her bosom heaved no more than if her life had stopped in its course. Her movements only were extraordinarily rapid.

When she asked one of the ladies' maids, who was then in the apartment of Madame de Scudemor, if she could see her mother, her tone of voice

was curt and dry like that of an unfortunate creature driven to desperation, and wishing to be done with torturing doubt. The girl who was there answered that Madame de Scudemor had just gone into her *cabinet de toilette,* and would soon be ready. But Camilla, who inwardly felt that it was impossible for her to wait another instant, flew into her mother's dressing-room.

Yseult was in the midst of the feminine morning derangement, occupied by the thousand mysterious cares of the toilette forced upon woman by her organisation. She was extremely astonished to see Camilla in her room at that hour, and although she well knew that in this world there was only her daughter who would take the liberty of passing the threshold of the room where she then was, the movement she made to cover herself with the nightrobe betrayed something that was very like fear. The movement was all the more remarkable in Madame de Scudemor, as her patrician horror of haste never abandoned her. But Camilla was too much the prey of her feelings to notice this first gesture resembling confusion.

"Mother," boldly said Camilla, "I come to tell you the secret of my life. You have not guessed

at it. You have never asked me for it. But you must know all. Yes, you must!"

And there was nothing tender in her trembling voice. It could be seen that she quivered with rage, anxiety, hatred, with all the restrained sentiments that thrilled her tranquil breast, like a full vase in the hands of some one who holds his breath not to spill the liquid that is about to brim over its edges. Is not the heart the vase wherein swims our fate?

Madame de Scudemor was seated on a kind of *chaise longue* of black morocco. She looked at her daughter standing in front of her, and whose eyes, then as dry as hers, had an expression of extreme anger and resentment. The blood of the mother seemed to have escaped from her exhausted veins to her daughter's cheeks in two vermilion spots, vivid and burning, such as may be seen on the faces of delirious patients. It would have been a striking sight—these two women face to face—if their two pasts could have risen up behind them.

Madame de Scudemor drew the falling folds of her mantle across her soft bosom, like great Niobe, but the eternal marble was only in her soul. A ray of sunshine coming through the open window

struck upon her forehead, but brought no life. Her attitude caused her figure, formerly that of an Amazonian queen, to show the ungainliness caused by the fatigue of life. She hastened to pass her hand over her tarnished brow.

"I guess all!" she said, in her low and broken voice. "You love Allan!"

"Yes, I love him," rejoined the proud and jealous girl, eagerly seeking the encounter with her rival. "Yes, I love him, and my love dates from childhood! Did you not see, mother, that I was mad for him; that his life was mine; that I was drunk with him each day? Then you saw nothing, absolutely nothing, O my mother! Your maternal instinct"—she added, with ferocious irony—"could not warn you of your daughter's passion? I was at your side, and not once did you suspect that I loved him! And it is only to-day that you read it in my eyes and hear it in my speech!"

At these words Madame de Scudemor bent her head. In the insolent utterances of her daughter was there a more heavy and insupportable insult than in Allan's spittle? Did she feel that she had deceived herself, and that she was being punished for it; that if she had loved her daughter more she would have been more far-seeing? It

was the first time that the girl, guilty by the feeling that she so audaciously proclaimed, forgetful of all the modesty of her sex, remained dry-eyed during her shameless avowal, without respect or pity for the grief she was about to cause her mother. But there was no longer a mother. For Camilla there was only a rival, whom she wished to know and punish.

"And you also did not see he loved me!" she reiterated, in increasing tones of insult and power, radiant at the effect she thought she was producing, and feeling all her jealous fury awakened in front of her mother's grief, "and that I was unhappy! and that it was the joy of being loved that changed my voice, traced black circles round my eyes, and filled them with tears; and how I was so ill that I could scarcely walk! Did you never see my Allan—mine—look at me once? for that glance would have betrayed him and warned you! But where were your eyes, mother? You never once caught us at some caress too slowly interrupted! And yet we have so long lived on these caresses that once, at least, you ought to have caught us in the act!"

Madame de Scudemor did not answer. Was she blushing inwardly for the girl of no shame?

No, she knew this violence of passion called by men impudicity, and she took this well-known and fatal lust for what it was worth. Camilla, misunderstanding her mother's silence, revelled in the pleasure of her humiliation. There was a mirror behind Madame de Scudemor. Camilla's eyes fell upon the sparkling glass that sent her the reflection of her beauty, which passion seemed to paint with fire and add a crown of lightning flashes; and she saw the image of her troubled and worn-out mother, more dull than the water to be seen three paces off, all dirty and stagnant in the silver basin, forming an accusing picture of youth exhausted for ever. So there was a smile of satisfied revenge mingling with the unchaste confession of Camilla; for she felt that she had the upper hand, and that she was the more beautiful. And that idea excited her still more with cowardly triumph, impelling the conqueror to place foot on the neck of the prostrate enemy; with the rage which stabs with a word, and her eyes as fiery as the crater of a volcano, she placed on the shoulder of her mother a hand that was almost matricidal, and shaking her as if she would break her bones:

"Mother! my mother! Look at me now!" she

cried. "Do you not see that I am pregnant? Now, do you doubt how he loved me?"

It was only then that Yseult lifted her noble head. She was still impassive; for the only feeling of her soul, that atom lost in the midst of the opaque block, did not even possess energy enough to stamp its feeble imprint on her immovable and icy features. Slowly she took her daughter's hand, and drawing her towards her with tenderness not unmixed with strength:

"My poor little daughter, how you love him!" she said, with her pity that rose in presence of any grief. "How you must love him to speak thus to your mother!"

"And you?" answered Camilla, becoming pale again with hope and joy. "And you, do you not love him?"

"Ah! love has driven you mad, my child!" replied Madame de Scudemor.

But Camilla was already on her knees before her. She was annihilated, but happy. It was more than human nature could support all at once. Madame de Scudemor tried to lift her up, but she clung round her.

"Leave me where I am, at your feet, mother, and pardon me for having spoken thus to you. I

was crazy with grief. Pardon me! Ah! if you only knew what jealousy was!"

And with big tears she moistened the hands of her mother, who answered her, with her smile which was broken and vacant:

"Do you believe that I do not know?"

An hour passed, and Camilla was still seated on her mother's sofa. Relieved by sobbing, she told her all the details of her love for Allan. This young girl, who had been formerly repulsed by her mother's coldness, now almost put entire confidence in her. Since rage no longer possessed her, she once more found all her forgotten pudicity, bringing back all her forgotten, faded blushes. The sentiment of the step she had taken with such daring, and which she began to judge herself, covered her with confusion. With her downcast eyes and the irregular sighing of her bosom, she resembled a statue of shame, of outraged and suffering chastity.

"My child," said Madame de Scudemor to her, "I do not ask you to render an account of your struggles, nor of your defeats. Heaven keep me from being too hard towards you who have been led away by love, when I was guiltier than you! Ought I not to have watched over you both? Did

I not let myself be deceived by this childish friendship, hiding the danger of love? Ought not I to have preserved you, or at least to have strengthened you against your own heart, my poor daughter? I did not do so. My wrong is greater than yours. It is you who have to pardon me."

And the mother said this without tears, without expansion or caresses, but with such dark sadness that, as she listened, Camilla's heart softened towards her. Yseult knew well why her security had been so great. She would never have dared to believe that Allan might have loved the daughter of her he had so much loved as well, and such a short time ago. Her knowledge of sensual passion had made her suspect and fear nothing, and her divination was at fault. Those who have the most experience have also their moments of cecity, while the passions have always some secret held in reserve when we think we have plucked them all out of us, and the revelation is so often unexpected that we term perfidy what is naught but mystery.

"Give thanks to God, my dear child," continued Madame de Scudemor, patting Camilla's cheek, "that the fault which He pardons, but which men do not forgive, can be hidden from the eyes of

the world. In a few days you will be Madame de Cynthry. As for me, I thank your jealousy which made you warn me in time. You are very young, my daughter; you will not always be troubled with your old mother and be separated from society. In the world must you live, as I have. Believe me, it is quite enough to have to put up with the destiny that men have carved out for us women without having still to be at their mercy by the weaknesses of our heart."

When she heard these words did Camilla guess that her mother had been unhappy in bygone days? Having once more confidence in her on account of the tenderness with which she had so generously replied to the offence, had Camilla any desire to know more of the soul of the mother she had ofttimes calumniated? But she did not hazard any questions, manifested no wish to know, and kept down her sympathy and her soon surmounted compassion. All the habits of their life stood between these two women like an impassable obstacle. Those habits are never changed. If Camilla had wept at her mother's feet, it was because she was suffering from the cruel injustice with which she now reproached herself; because the joy of having no rival, still more than Yseult's goodness,

had flooded her soul with infinite happiness and gratitude. But the affection that had never reigned between Madame de Scudemor and her daughter could not be born of so little. It was too late!

XIII.

On leaving her mother, Camilla returned to Allan, who was devoured by shame and anxiety as he thought of what was about to take place, and all her fears having been swept from her soul, she begged his pardon for her suspicions in the same way as she had apologised to her mother for the violence of her misgivings and the brutality of her confession. Such is the human heart! It costs nothing to humiliate oneself when one enjoys the benefits of the offence; but if the affront has been sterile or if it has led to the discovery of what one feared, the generosity of repentance does not spring up, and we remain steadily in the wrong.

"So I shall be your wife," said Camilla to Allan. "My mother has promised me, and our life will begin to be happy once more!"

This was a last illusion, the remains of faith soon ruined, and with which no edifice can be rebuilt. It was a bouquet of the day before replaced upon the bosom it had perfumed, but from which the scent was gone. As yet Camilla had no ex-

perience of her own heart. She thought she could revive the delicate flower that perishes so quickly, and which is known as faith in love. Alas! the roots of the mysterious plant were already withering in Allan's heart. He did not accept Camilla's hopes. Although they came from the loved one, they were not imposed upon him by her. Taught by the shortness of the duration of his happiness, he prayed that love should afterwards not retire, and perhaps this modest vow of an exhausted heart was still a too ambitious demand.

Camilla told him what had transpired in her mother's apartments. Her attentive and troubled soul dwelt upon every detail; he saw that Yseult had not belied herself, and that he had outraged her when he trembled for her. Once again he admired this woman, sublime in self-possession, who never was victim to the least confusion. What he knew of Yseult, and of which Camilla was ignorant, caused him to judge Yseult in a manner that he kept to himself.

"My mother is good," said Camilla, "and she has been generous."

But Allan knew that Yseult's generosity was placed higher than in her breast. It was the knowledge of passion that had been felt, the abso-

lution of the mind given to the most involuntary part of human nature, together with the impartiality of history.

What was lacking in the sensibility of Madame de Scudemor was what precisely constituted its originality. It was always the same attitude, the same look, the same woman—if that word did not imply all that there is most versatile in this world. She seemed as restful and as calm as strength. But it was not her will, that source of moral grandeur, that had silenced inward revolt; she had suffered and bled lengthily beneath her crown of thorns, and then her brow had become hardened. But to attempt nothing against Fate is to be more resigned than by remaining downcast. She had attempted naught against her dead passions to kill them, and, altogether, she was only an ideal type of woman's weakness. Allan, whom she had not loved, and who did not love her more, retained for her a kind of respectful religion. The way in which she had welcomed her daughter's avowal made him sure of the manner in which she would act with him. If he had doubted her for a moment, the doubt could not last. Nevertheless, he could not prevent himself from feeling a certain uneasiness resembling his first fears. Our wrong-

doing makes us cowardly, and the evil he had wrought was not effaced.

"Would things remain as they were," he asked himself, "or would she recur to what had passed between them?"

Madame de Scudemor had shown the delicacy of silence; might she not persist in it? Although such an interview, with sad and humiliating memories, could only be painful for him, he almost wished for it—if only to escape from the vague incertitude that he felt wrapped about him.

For life had closed in upon all three since the day that Camilla had told all to her mother. The same existence, with its monotonous, eternal, slow routine, always wipes out everything. It is true that very little time had elapsed, but Yseult had confided nothing yet to Allan concerning the promise made to Camilla, and no allusion had even escaped her. What was she waiting for, since she was resolute? What was working in that soul wrapped in a fleshly envelope, fading more and more every day, and which, notwithstanding, was impenetrable as when at the epoch when rude health and powerful beauty formed the shelter of a shield for the heart when stirred? If Madame de Scudemor had loved Allan de Cynthry; if, in the

interest of her daughter's happiness, she had had to make some great and obscure sacrifice—the heart's blood offered secretly to God in the pure vase of the conscience—her struggle would have explained her silent hesitation. We have often to do like the Roman—take our entrails in our hands, and die twice over. But Yseult did not possess the virtuous difficulty of sacrifice. Passionately lustful, she would have been greater; she would have been more saintly. But what she really was can only be set down here. It was the poverty of the soul, almost smiling at her inglorious devotion, and which did not relieve her misery.

Every day Camilla asked Allan, "Has mother spoken to you to-day?" And upon the negative answer of the young man, she added, with slightly impatient hope, "It will be for to-morrow." She was sure that Allan had never loved but her, and the future for both appeared long and unclouded as in the first moments of her love and during the brightest days of her life. Why could she not live that life over again? Why were there differences between her past and present happiness, since there were none in her love? She tried to explain her troubles and her worries to herself by the exactions of her feelings that would be appeased by the union

of marriage. She "worked herself up" to be happy. When we are less content, we reproach ourselves with loving less. We have remorse for the felicity which has become impossible, because poor loving souls are timorous, and to suffer more, confound the aridity of life with the hardness of the heart!

The misgivings and jealousy that had embittered Camilla's love had not diminished its violence. Her lover was just as dear to her. The woman who is capable of affection does not alter her mind very quickly. It was not quite the same with Allan. He was a man, stronger and more brutal. He had no need to place both hands on the wound whence his love was escaping, for it did not seem to be mortal. It resembled one of those imperceptible sores which only daily exudes one or two drops of pale pinkish blood, and does not endanger life, not even making one paler. The eye sparkles with the same azure plenitude of light and tears. One drinks intoxication from every cup, and the hand holds them still to the greedy lips without weakness; but these two drops of blood return always at the same spot, wiped away each evening and never dried up—this is death. From thence the soul sweats out its agony. It is the

contrary of the martrydom of Christ. The thorns tore the divine temples, and eternal flowers flourished in the heart that was full of love. For us men the floral crown still scents the hair, while our hearts expire beneath the poisoned dart. Allan, who was a god, wished to continue to love when he could scarcely do so. Soon Camilla would only interest him by remembrance, which has not always any power. Such is the contradiction of man's nature. He would have preferred the suspicions and the fits of rage of the jealous woman to the ardent confidences and tender expansions of the reassured mistress. He only responded by the clumsiness of coldness. Vainly, seeing her so tender and so faithful, did he reject the idea of afflicting the heart that was all his. He said to himself that he would give her all his life. It was an insufficient gift in the place of love—this tunic that tears the flesh of our flanks away with it when we try to pull it off. But would this foolish generosity of an hour ratify the engagements made a week afterwards? The wrong was irreparable. It is not true, as has been said, that in love there is a worm of the sea that stops up the holes made in the precious shell with pearls. Only the dirty and corroding sea-water passes through, and it tarnishes

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and bites a little more. Such is life; such is our soul! The pages that follow will not be opened, for probably only the atheists of love living despairingly in the midst of the overturned altars and the broken idols of life will be able to continue this sad story.

XIV.

Nevertheless, the much-wished for day arrived. Suddenly Madame de Scudemor sent for Allan. She had not yet come downstairs. Allan found her in her room, seated in a well-known spot, and which he had never forgotten. It was on the sofa where, for the first time, she had spoken to him of his love, that she had divined with such great compassion, and where, conquered by his tears, she had reversed her sentence of exile. When Allan entered that room and saw Yseult in her old place, he felt something analogous to the impression made upon the mind by the apartments of those we have loved and lost. Alas! here everything was the same. Only Allan's heart had changed.

But no! all was not the same. Yseult also was as extremely changed in her external appearance as Allan was in his most intimate feelings. Time had struck one of them on the surface and attainted the man more than skin-deep, but the young man's heart could yet glean harvests of love and scatter them abroad; while in the woman, the

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arid storm-wind of life had carried away all that beauty which seemingly ought to have taken longer to expire.

Allan was deeply moved as he approached the Countess of Scudemor, who had been plain Yseult for him. She saw by his looks what agitated his heart, and made him sit by her side on the sofa.

"Allan," she at once began to say to him, "I guess you do not think that I have called you to me to make you any reproaches? You have loved Camilla, and have been loved by her. You led her astray; you the man—that is to say, the stronger of the two, and for that very reason you ought to have preserved her from yourself; but you were led away as she was. You did not act in cold blood, nor with base calculation. As I know you have a noble nature, perhaps you struggled long against your love. But you see, my friend, how terrible are the consequences of passion, since one is forced to give them absolution!

"But why did you wait so long before confessing all to me? My daughter would have been ruined in the eyes of the world if a feeling of jealousy, that your slowness and delay drove to a pitch of exaltation, had not given her that confidence she never had with me. Were you then proud

enough or cowardly enough to sacrifice the woman you loved to the inevitable embarrassment of an avowal? And why even this embarrassment, Allan? Did I give you the right to doubt Yseult? If I had been any other woman, I could better conceive your hesitation. But did you not know me? Did it seem to you that I lived under the influence of the ideas and sentiments of the multitude? Did you not remember the past? Ought it not have helped you to judge me as I am? Did you not remember what I told you so many times and in this very room?"

And she pointed to the carpet, which her foot trampled down haughtily, as one stamps upon some miserable lost affection.

"Yes, in this room, where we are together after four years have passed; you cured of your mad love, and I about to become your mother! What I desired then, have I ever ceased to call for it? Ah! if, during these few years when I wished to spare you the suffering I knew too well, I had tried to revive some feeling, however weak, I might understand that you did not dare to suddenly tear a last illusion from me. But you know, Allan, if I believed your words for once only, and if our bonds were not always loosely tied!"

"Yseult," replied Allan, "you are the most sincerely and simply great woman that ever existed. No! I never judged you from a common standard. If I did not confide in you, it was because I had no confidence in myself. First love leaves gaps in our heart that the second cannot fill, and there are reproaches that we make to ourselves as if we had been unfaithful. I avoided you, Yseult, as I tried to avoid my conscience—that conscience that never leaves us!"

"Say rather your pride, my friend," she rejoined, "for a man despises himself for not being able to love long, if his disposition be neither frivolous nor degraded. But ought you to have had that pride with me, Allan? Did I not prophesy the early death of your love? Did I not show the miseries of the heart, so soon growing cold, so soon satiated, and was it not in mine that I went and fetched them to show you? Was it not in speaking of all my emptiness that I tried to convince you of the inanity of the affections? Was not my heart in your hand like the skull in that of Hamlet, when he sought there for a thought and found nothing?"

As she pronounced these melancholy words with her slow and unmelodious voice, leaning as she

did on her elbow, crumpling with her left hand a long orange shawl which had fallen from her shoulders to her hips and softly floated about her, like the golden scarf of eventide on the rugged flank of a mountain—austere symbol of Fate—she seemed to shake out all the secrets of life and death from the soft drapery spread over her knees. Allan contemplated her in her majestic attitude, pale, but not sullen, like the marble of a tomb without a cypress, and the conviction that she once more expressed—the science of the heart she had learnt and retained—struck him like some new truth. From the ardent bush of his imagination, God at length appeared to this Moses of love, and made him veil his face as he listened to the terrible law, so long ignored and denied! Was it the harmony that there was between what Yseult said and what she was as she said it—with her lost beauty, her eyes like torches about to die out, her breast where it seemed there could be seen the ruts of the chariot of life made in the last few rapidly fleeting years—was it this devastation of her decline that taught Allan better what was the end of all life's glories, and initiated him still more into the secret of our loves of dust and ashes? Did the sibyl speak for him louder than the oracle? Where

was the first tide of youth, which often goes out of our heart when, on the shores of existence, the surf rolls high and seems as if still coming up? Allan felt the fatal adhesion of his spirit to the words of Madame de Scudemor. The idea that his second love was about to expire like the first was as yet quite vague, but stood out surprisingly clear in his sight. He viewed himself fully. Yseult and Camilla seemed to him to be the two corpses at the bottom of his heart. He saw them and held his tongue, denying nothing more. The strong young fellow was tamed at last by the truth. The hatchet might be plied with increasing force at the roots of the tree, not a bird or a branch would fall from it. The soul had been emptied of its last doubts and its most opinionated illusions.

"Allan," continued Madame de Scudemor, after a moment of silence, with the smile that Shakespeare ascribes to Patience looking at Grief, "Allan, in a few days you will marry my daughter. I will not say to you: 'May you be happy!' I could not utter those words without lying. But may your love and hers for you last long! That I wish. Now it will be easier for you not to betray with Camilla that past which we cannot always forget. Let it remain an eternal secret between us! But

there is another secret still that must also be buried."

Allan looked at her without understanding. She rejoined, without giving him the time to put a question:

"Listen, Allan! When my daughter, who in a week will be your wife, came to announce her pregnancy to me, I could have answered her that I was pregnant as well!"

Allan started and shrieked; but Yseult placed her hand on the young man's mouth.

"Beware!" she said, "Camilla might hear you. Restrain yourself if you are a man. See," she added, throwing aside the two ends of the shawl that had been crossed on her knees, "if I kept my secret well!"

She was eight months "gone."

"I ought not," she continued, "to have revealed this to you, until the very moment when I should have been in need of your help, so that no one can find it out. You guessed not at the true motive of my suffering. And yet not one of my movements, not one of my attitudes, was aught else but cruel imposture. But, thanks to being in the habit of enduring pain, I was unconquered, and the only time that Camilla might have suspected

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all the truth was when she took me by surprise, half-naked in my dressing room, before I had time to cover myself up in my mantle."

Allan was crushed by fright and astonishment.

"My calm alarms you, Allan," she said; "but the idea that now weighs you down has oppressed me for the last eight months. I gave way to you out of pity, it is by my pity that I am punished. That feeling, like all others of mine, was fated to turn against me!

"As for you, Allan," she went on, "you are twice a father, and there will be one of your children whose birth you will hide, because men will brand it with the hangman's mark. It is not for myself, as I have naught to ask of life, and the insults and scorn of the world could not draw one movement of revolt from this heart that is dead, or from my crushed nerves. Ah, indeed, it is not for myself that I claim silence and obscurity. But it is for the child, on whom Pity, of which it is the offspring, has impressed a curse even in my very womb. It is not for Camilla's child, born of happy and mutual life, but it is for mine, Allan; it is for the sad child of Pity! You will soon have a duty to discharge with regard to Camilla, and from this day forward, perhaps, is it not so? Let my

child be sacrificed to that of Camilla. I shall not complain. On the contrary, I ask and will it! Above all, Camilla must be spared the cruel pain of wounded love. Since I see that, you must understand that also; for I have only my womanly pity to guide me, and you have your love! Allan, I should like to give you courage in the presence of this paternity which already pursues you like remorse. Your other child will not rob you of the love you will feel for the one who will call you 'father' less loudly. You will love it, will you not? You can pay all and be quits by love. You may even efface a misfortune you may have caused. It is impossible that you will not love this child. Alas! I, who can never love anything more on this earth; I, who have conceived without love, I can only offer it that pity which did not suffice for the father, and will also not suffice for it. Allan," she said, in a deep, low tone, after a pause, "love it well for both of us!"

This prayer of a mother was worthy of raising the greatest emotion, as she asked for her child to be loved more than herself, knowing that within her breast there was not enough love for it. Allan measured the extent of the woman's misfortune. Touched to the depths of his being, he took her

hands in his, the contact now causing only a sweet and cold sensation.

"Yseult," said he, "oh, Yseult, noble and unfortunate woman, you still deceive yourself! You will love your child!"

"Ah! you know well that I cannot," she returned, with the tenderness of sublime resignation. "Our will can no more make us love than it can cause us to live. Happy, without doubt, are those women who die before they have loved! Fate has not deigned to let me be included with them, and the force of the love that I possessed has only served to make me suffer, even after I had lost it!"

And seeing that his words of consolation were useless, Allan abandoned the hands he held, as the shipwrecked mariner lets go his last plank of safety.

"Allan, there is nothing to be done," said Yseult, shaking her head, as his movement had not escaped her notice. "You, too, have pitied me as I had pity on you. You wish to make me believe in a feeling that no longer exists. But forcing one to believe in a feeling is to give it. God could do that, but not mankind. My poor child, let me finish my life with my isolated soul! That perhaps will not be very long. Above all, do not try to give

me back what I no longer possess. Have you not lost your love in doing so? You will lose your pity in the same way. Do not turn away from love and the happiness of life for me. Perhaps I seem to you to be ungrateful, because I do not give way to tenderness. Remember the child, but forget the mother! It is only the love that is bestowed upon us that we are not allowed to forget. That is why Camilla should be ever sacred to you, even though you may one day cease to love her. Go to her, my friend; tell her I endorse the gift that she has made you of herself, and that I have received your promise to make her happy. Drive from your brow those clouds that might still make her uneasy. Go, friend, and leave me!"

Allan felt the burden of the confidence made to him, and the thoughts she had caused to rise tumultuously in him, too much, and he could not obey the injunction of Madame de Scudemor. He hesitated, and still remained standing. But she, who read in his soul better than he did himself, said to him, as she arose from the sofa, lifting back on her shoulders the shawl she had dropped, and which she draped around her tired form:

"Come now, my son, give me your arm, and let us go together and find Camilla!"

And they went down into the garden, where they thought to find her, but did not succeed. The sun had gone down half an hour ago, but it had left behind some of the rays with which it had inundated the whole earth. Gold and liquid vermilion seemed scattered in profusion, painting everything. The sky was of the darkest blue, and grew darker every moment from the borders of the horizon to the zenith. It was a singular and striking contrast! Shadow was thrown from the regions of light, and the earth, in its opaque vapours, was lit up with some strange remains of brilliancy that had disappeared from above. The day was dying from the highest point, like a man of genius going mad. Light was leaving the world like the most noble faculties of a living personality. But life remained to one as in the other. But it was a blind, dark, stupid life; some ardent sleep interrupted by dreams and sweats. Truly, that day the earth was uneasy. One could almost feel it moving beneath one's feet. The air was full of sweetness of every kind, moist harmonies and soft perfumes; and it was one of those moments when man, in unison with the Great All that surrounded him, lets his heart bathe, with powerful voluptuousness, in the vast heart of nature.

"How beautifully dies this day!" murmured Yseult.

One might have thought that she envied the glorious decline of that radiant day. To her who had so long resembled fecund and luxuriant nature, there only remained a dull sky at the end of her day, a cold wind after so many storms. While awaiting Camilla, she had seated herself by the side of Allan, on a bench at the extremity of the terrace, with the grace which had remained much more faithful to her than her beauty; and Allan, at those words which he might have taken as a regret, had a presentiment of the approaching end of Madame de Scudemor. A voice spoke in his heart, and told him that the betrayed desire had been granted, but this presentiment that veiled the man's brow with a great sadness, did not touch that of the woman, who would have driven it away as a too bold hope of deliverance. Allan only was accessible to it, as he only suffered from it. The memory of the love that he had felt for her was attested in a touching and sacred manner by Yseult's state of pregnancy. Alas! must we call this egotism? or would not God allow Yseult to receive in her turn, in a pure manner, the feeling that she had bestowed without reserve? Round

about her, as within her, there was only solitude. And even the tender emotion that Allan felt at that juncture was less pity for her than pity for her unborn child.

XV.

The few days' delay mentioned by Madame de Scudemor soon passed away. As her return from Italy was hardly known in Paris, and as, besides, the state of her health would have been a sufficient pretext not to celebrate the marriage in grand style, she invited no one. It was resolved that nothing should be changed in the life they all three led at the Château of the Willows until the winter, when the young couple would go to Paris.

Therefore the ceremony was concluded, as all marriages should be made, obscurely, in the country, at a little village church. No ironical, envious, or impious society crowd accompanied the handsome young folk who were joined to each other before God, and no one was there to spy out the modest joys of the wife on her forehead, where the next day obscene looks would have sought for them, in the midst of her blushes and confusion. The only witnesses were a few young fellows and some old people of the village in their holiday clothes. They were simple souls, who in that mar-

riage ceremony saw the greatest event of their life to come, and the most touching incident of their past existence. Camilla had chosen as bridesmaid one of the young lasses who the day before had come to offer the orange flowers from which she was to pluck the branch that custom decrees should ornament her brow. Alas! it was no longer a symbol! Although happy, the bride looked long and thoughtfully at the white blossom that was to tell a lie, and blushing for both, she modestly hid it under one of the coils of her abundant tresses. It was thus that from being the emblem of innocence the flower became that of the mystery hidden in the womb of Camilla.

Mademoiselle de Scudemor had never been so beautiful. The pictures of the past mingling with the ideas arising from the circumstances of the day bestowed most charming embarrassment upon her. She was in a troubled state, full of languid intoxication, and ardour bathed in sadness, which was more voluptuous than the ardour itself. Even in her bearing there was something of her soul. From the gate to the church, built in the middle of the enclosure, she leant upon Allan's arm, not like a timid and ignorant young girl, but also not like a happy woman proud of her husband's

love. It was something of both of these feelings. Seeing her thus advancing on Allan's arm, an observer or a poet with sure intuition would have perhaps suspected the position of this languishing spouse; but there was no poet or observer among the villagers, who did not know that the actual happiness of the day was rendered more intoxicating still by the weight of sensual memories. They were candid folk who had never thought about themselves, and whom nothing had ever taught that to be guilty makes a woman more happy on the day of the desired union than if she had remained innocent.

Cowslips had been strewn in the nave, where, from the open windows, came gushes of fresh, pure air. More than once during the ceremony the pigeons of the parsonage came and perched upon the sills of the casements like joyful messengers. Camilla could see them from the foot of the altar where she was receiving the blessing of the priest. Superstitious thought rose in her, as it often happens in solemn moments of life, even to the least visionary of women. She imagined that these birds were omens, and that if they left the windows before the end of the ceremony her happiness would fly away with them. Alas, the birds

took wing! The dazzling beauty of Camilla became overcast with sudden pallor as great as that of her mother, who, standing by her side, without smiles or tears, watched her child being married. But Camilla's pallor soon disappeared when Allan's voice was heard, while for Yseult it was a shroud that she would take with her to the grave.

After the ceremony, Camilla asked Allan to return with her on foot to the Château. Madame de Scudemor, whose suffering state necessitated much care, got into her carriage, and left them. It was June, a month bathed in light, and warmed by the sun like a glance from a loving woman. On the opposite side to the marsh the air was warm, and along the whole road they took there was the languid perfume of colza, balancing its thousand golden plumes as far as the eye could reach. Wheat was behindhand. The thin ears of a soft green hue grew no higher than the colza in bloom. In other spots clover spread out its dark crimson lake carpet, and no trees shaded these plains, roofed in by the canopy of heaven alone. Allan and Camilla went across them step by step, following the narrow paths spared by the carts on the borders of the fields—a walk that reminded them of those taken in the same parts nearly four years before.

Camilla especially appreciated the charm of this stroll. She remembered her isolation when Allan had been ill, and the memory of past pain gave a delicious piquancy to the emotion that arose in her heart. It was in these fields that she had nursed her secret of uneasiness and jealous friendship that heralded the advent of love so well—love in spite of herself as with us all. It was there that she had dried her tears, if, indeed, she had shed any. And she could no more find on the red earth of the road the trace of her little childish foot than she could feel in her heart the remains of the pain she had endured.

"This walk is a pilgrimage of expiation, Allan," said Camilla. "I desired that on the day when we begin to be inseparable we should both pass together where I wended my way all alone and unhappy. When you were ill after your fall, and suffering from the fever which nearly killed you, mother had exiled me from your room, and it was here that I used to come and wait for the too long days to finish!"

Allen pressed her hand that he held in his. The happy woman thought he understood her. By his silence she guessed at a wave of emotion that did not exist. Her words had awakened devouring

memories in her husband's heart. He thought of Yseult, and with what care she had nursed him. He remembered her as she sat at the head of his bed, and by a singular contradiction, what he felt resembled regret more than remorse. He was an unfortunate man, who turned away from the present and the future, not satiated with the former and disgusted with the perspective of the latter, so he threw his thoughts into the past that no longer belonged to him. It was thus that after having loved Camilla, and at the moment when she was his for life, having just sworn before God and man to love her always, in spirit he was unfaithful to her for the first time.

But he was ashamed at this involuntary regret; he stifled it, and thought he had done with the past. He was mistaken. First love has an influence on the whole life. One loves afterwards, one loves again and again, and perchance one loves better. But one carries a mark in the heart, a cursed or blessed sign, but it is ineffaceable. The finger of the first loved woman is like that of God. The imprint thereof is eternal. At each love that concludes, at each illusion that fades, at each lock of hair culled from a lifeless head, one image alone appears and peoples the empty heart, and it

always seems that we have only betrayed one woman.

Those who are married know this well. We must be either madly infatuated or very stupid, if on the wedding-day we do not suffer from some incomprehensible sadness, even if we are one of those people who have not lived by the heart. Little boarding-school misses sometimes, married in the morning, have been seen to shiver at the evening dance, in their silks and satins, without knowing why this icy shudder made them quiver on such a day. Allan tried to inwardly stifle all the dulness of his heart, in the midst of the impotent joys of the simple feast that was given at the Willows. The villagers and the fisher-folk of the Douve danced on the grass. Camilla joined the merry maze, but she retired early. She was no longer the young girl who sees the coming of night with the trembling of frightened pudicity, weakly struggling against desire. She knew what was behind the curtains of the nuptial couch, and if she aspired to the mysterious and sacred hour, it was to be alone with the man she loved, alone and entirely his, without having no fear of the interruption of a caress.

At last the moment arrived when the closing of

a door left them together. They had just left the mother, who, fatigued, had been forced to seek her bed. When Allan wished a quiet night to the woman whom he abandoned on the bed where he had passed many a night at her side, to go and keep awake with another while she would try and sleep—if the child she carried in her womb did not disturb her slumbers—he was so greatly troubled that the kiss meant for the cheek fell, by his rapid and confused movement, on the edge of the well-known lips. They were always the same—cold and dry. But this involuntary and hasty kiss, given in a half-hearted way and as quickly withdrawn, caused him a striking impression, and threw his mind back into the midst of the thoughts he had tried to drive away in the morning.

"Oh! at last we are alone, and our own masters!" exclaimed Camilla, with the artlessness of deep love, as she entered the room which they were to share henceforward. Madame de Scudemor in person had arranged every detail of their apartments. Everything was commodious and elegant, attesting the imagination of a woman who had known what love was, and the wadded luxury it demanded. Who can say if for Yseult there was not some grief attached to every item in this

room ornamented and arranged by her? But she had forgotten nothing. A cruel or sad thought had perhaps accompanied all she had done, so that Camilla's happiness should not be spoilt by any rough angles to things surrounding her; so that the naked feet of the happy bride should not be offended by the harshness of any carpet they might tread. Despite all, the unfortunate woman had not forgotten to say: "Let me arrange so that she can enjoy her felicity in comfort!" although perhaps she inwardly contrasted her situation with that of Camilla, while she evoked her past distress in one of those remembrances that survive general forgetfulness, and which, mingling with the acts of the daily life, "blacken every dream"—as Crabbe has said—"and poison every prayer." But, alas! since long ago there were no dreams or prayers for her.

The ball was over early at the Willows. Respect was paid to the rest of Madame de Scudemor. The peasants did not prolong their dances on the lawn late into the night. A window had remained open in Allan and Camilla's room. The atmosphere was so temperate that they did not think of shutting it. The moon began to whiten the blue cupola of the sky, and the acacias of the gardens exhaled

their orange-like perfume. It was nothing more than an ordinary fine night, but for tender souls the soft music of nature was playing that melody which above all others is most apt to throw them into the insensate joy of tearful reveries.

Camilla was not what one could call "a tender soul." There was something impulsive and determined about her which excluded all idea of soft affection. But let a woman's sensibility be as passionate as it may, it is never like that of a man, which attaches greater importance to the rounding-off of angles and corners. In the sensibility of the female there is always to be heard over and over again a kind of charming wail, like the very weariness of happiness that weighs them down, and which they cannot long support. Such was the style of Camilla's tenderness. On the other hand, one of the peculiarities of happiness is the slowness of the movements of those who are revelling in it. So as to live all the longer with the thoughts that bring felicity, we hold to them with great difficulty, like a deep aspiration that cannot be breathed again. Even the body has only one attitude, as if there was some invisible and sudden collision to be feared. Camilla had slowly led her husband to the window. Instead of looking at the

man she loved, she contemplated the night, as pure as the soul, or rather she saw neither one nor the other. Without seeking for it, she received the impression of both. Something of nature and something of love was bound to form the sum total of her emotion; for there is perfect concordance between nature and the heart, whence resulted the infinite felicity she then tasted, and of which all her other hastily devoured joys had only been the promise. The window closed, the curtain drawn, she would have loved Allan just as much; she would have been just as much alone with him, but she would not have been so happy. The joy of our soul should be called Pan, because it is everything, and is composed of all things. Tears were in Camilla's eyes, and she did not see that through them she looked and found the sky more beautiful, more limpid, more moist in the azure transparency of its ether. She leant her head on Allan's shoulder. He was about to speak to her. In a low voice she said to him:

"Oh! let me be!"

She did not move; she did not think; she wished for nothing. Happiness had made her the equal of an affectionate, tender woman. Let them speak out and say if real happiness is not that state of

the soul which they alone know, when the voice of the loved one is less sweet than silence, and when even a kiss would be refused.

It would be an adorable wedding-night that could pass away in such a way. But from long ago, Allan only knew the intoxication of love. Marriage did not cause the felicity of the first days of love or some better feeling of joy to bloom again in his heart, as it did in that of Camilla. Had he been endowed with the soul of a poet in vain? This feeling, so powerful and so chaste, and the charm of nature, which was just as great, did not succeed in freeing him from the bondage of his thoughts. Like Camilla, he, too, was silent, but he suffered. He was thinking of the other woman, doubtless counting the hours in solitude and sleeplessness. Whether it was pity or regret, he saw naught within himself but confusion, and inwardly asked if his first love had not been properly extinguished. In vain he resolved to adore Camilla. Such mad vows do we make to ourselves when there is no more love, or when it is dying out. The idea of happiness found once more by her, and which he feared to dispel, added yet again to the smart of his torture. To escape therefrom, after many movements in different ways, he

called voluptuousness to his aid, and on his wife's silky neck, looking more like satin still by the ultramarine torrent that inundated it in the blue moonlight, he tried to warm his lips, still cold from the contact of Yseult's lips.

"'Tis you!" murmured Camilla, passing her arms round his neck; "'tis you! and so for life!"

She had not the strength to put her face near Allan's, nor to finish her caress, so happy was she! Was it not sacrilegious on the part of Allan to call this woman back from the pure regions of reverie and the most ineffable delights, when she was lost therein, to make her live once more the terrestrial life of the sensual passion she had momentarily abandoned? That was because he wished to provoke delirium in which he could hide from her and himself, and which in former days he had not troubled to seek.

But the thought eating into his brain was stronger than all his efforts. The young girl, so long desired and at last obtained, was not only the bride of that morning; she was a woman of no mystery, possessing nothing more than the love which is so great when a woman has given herself up, and has nothing more than that to give, her last gift, spurned by the foot of man! Thus

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her free caresses did not move away unhappy Allan's pain, and he tried to escape from it. He flew into silent rage against himself and fate, and because the magnificent creature seated on his knee, and whose swelling and voluptuous hips he ardently pressed, no longer caused him to feel what he felt formerly, and which he so much wanted at that juncture. As for her, she only saw in her husband's transports what they concealed from her soul, so amorously deceived! Each moment she gave way more. Then, as she was naturally sensual, she did more than give way. The positions were reversed. Allan, defeated by the resistance of his soul, felt that Camilla, formerly so powerful, was nothing more than a woman. The husband remained, but the lover had disappeared.

"Your lips are cold, and so is your brow," said Camilla. "It is the night air."

And in a lower tone she added, with a blush, those words of intimacy in which two lives mingle, becoming filthy if more than one hears them:

"Let us go to bed."

She rose from off her husband's lap and went to arrange her hair for the night at the mirror. In a twinkling, her bridal robe fell to her feet. She

bounded out of it, having nothing more on than her white petticoat and stays, the graceful narrow cuirass that she soon quickly unlaced. Three paces off, Allan looked moodily at her. At each veil that dropped, some fresh charm was revealed: an entirely naked arm, a shoulder escaping from the disturbed folds of the last garment, the more full betrayal of a rounded breast. He looked at her mechanically, as a satiated man stares with cold and vacant look at the cup which he has emptied, and which has quenched his thirst. And yet he does not want to break it.

. . . . . .

Nevertheless, Camilla did not notice the sombre sadness that lay beneath all Allan's caresses. The wedding night was only bitter for him. As for her, her suspicious instincts had been put to sleep, and emotion had not given them time to awaken. But for anybody else than Camilla, Allan's face in the half-light of the lamp would have borne witness to the anguish that choked him. He stifled. In the arms of his young wife, he dissembled his inward fury at not being able to lose his reason entirely. She, her eyes half-closed, and half-swooning with lust, her head leaning over the edge of the pillow, made tepid by her breath, abandoned

the marvellous undergrowth of her arms to be inhaled by Allan, as if it formed bunches of intoxicating flowers. The cruel fellow bit at it more than once with all the rage of deceived desire. Happily, his mouth did not deliver the horrible secret in its bites, and next day Camilla only saw the trace of a night of love and lust.

Happy Camilla! She slept not, and the hours fled by, as full and as rapidly for her as they were slow and empty for Allan. He cursed her powerful vitality, resisting the fatigue of love spasms and sleeplessness. He wished that she would close her eyes in slumber. He would thus have been free and able to heave a deep sigh of relief. When Camilla's eyes, whose brilliancy was now as veiled as they were generally sparkling, lifted their dark eyelids full of burning languor to look at her husband and then drop them again, Allan trembled lest she should see clear in his soul. Once he extinguished the night-light, which threw its gleam on the bed; and the room and the group formed by the couple all disappeared in the darkness. If Camilla, in that obscurity, had passed her hands over the face that was bent towards her, perhaps she might have found the frowns and wrinkles of the grief that her husband hid from her.

That night seemed of unparalleled length to Allan. It foreshadowed the insupportable perspective of its return at the end of each day like an eternal torture. He counted every second with all the anxiety of him who waits. But what was he waiting for? That the woman should sleep? That was but a paltry interruption of his life. Would not the awakening bring back what was irrevocable? And as he said this to himself in the midst of the torments endured on his wife's bosom, he felt that she held him still more narrowly to her, and he returned her clasp. How impenetrable are the few inches of flesh of our breasts, since the beatings of the heart that Camilla pressed to her bosom did not warn her!

At last, when day began to break, Camilla fell asleep out of sheer lassitude. Sleep comes to those who are happy as it does to the righteous. Beneath the first rays of dawn, Allan looked upon her, as she closed her eyes, grown heavy, and gradually lost all consciousness. A delicious sight when one really loves! But he did not enjoy this idolising contemplation. He was on the alert for the moment when he could disengage himself from the arms that embraced him without waking her. He slowly unwound them, these arms that were

so strong when they held him, and which the pressure of his body had impressed in many places with deep red marks. He furtively left the bed as if it was not his, dressed hastily, and sat in one of the easy-chairs by the mantelpiece. He took up a book to fly from himself, but he did not understand a word he read, and remained plunged in his grief.

The sun was high when Camilla woke. Before opening her eyes, she made a movement as if to seek for him who ought to have been reposing by her side, and not finding him there, she started up in fright, her eyes wide open and staring. But before she called Allan, she caught sight of him, downcast and pale, in the chimney-corner.

"What are you doing there?" she asked him anxiously.

He gave her as reason that he had not felt very well, and that he had risen without wishing to disturb the sleep she had enjoyed only a few short hours.

"But I am all right now," he added.

"Come and kiss me!" said Camilla, falling back softly on the bed.

His lips met her greedy mouth, but his kiss was as empty as the heart that gave it.

The first morning salute of her new existence possessed mayhap no power of illusion for Camilla. Be that as it may, she was sad the day after her marriage. She was no longer moved as in the preceding afternoon when she heard herself called "Madame." She was miserable, and could not tell her own self why. But more than once she remembered the birds that flew away, and that she had taken as an omen.

XVI.

Does any one exist who, having allowed his heart to have full sway in life, has not experienced that in the feelings which cause the most suffering there are sometimes strange interruptions, or a kind of unexpected and inexplicable resurrection of happiness? That had happened to Camilla the day her jealous suspicions had vanished on listening to the frank and compassionate words of her mother, and it had lasted until her marriage. The hand that tightened on her heart had loosened its grasp, and it had free play once more. But it was the last time. She had reached the highest peak on the summit of life's happiness only to be dashed down all the more violently.

The sadness of the day after her wedding left her no more and she could find no reason for such morose anxiety. She had no reproach to make to her husband. When she had been jealous she attributed Allan's coolness to all kinds of motives; she could do so no longer. Besides, although Allan had always seemed to her to have a melan-

choly disposition, he was more expansive and less irritable since his marriage. Alas! what she took for expansion was a little more ease in the simple relationship between husband and wife, which seemed false from lover to mistress, obliged to hide and dissemble. It was only the difference between whispering and speaking aloud. The truthfulness of their situation in the eyes of other people prevented much friction. Sometimes one may have to concentrate and devour rage and irritation for twenty-four hours, because one misses an appointment on a staircase by a few seconds, for fear a lackey has been playing the spy.

Looking at marriage as it is practised in the present century, from its elegant and polite side, that of Allan and Camilla was certainly all it ought to have been. The husband was full of attention for his wife. He had all the delicacy and anticipation of her slightest wishes that comes as much from the politeness of the heart as from the justice of the mind. And it must be said that he had even more when Madame de Scudemor was not present. But if perchance she was with them, he did not dare to give way to any of those silent and charming abandonments which in domestic life are so touching in the sight of the mother of

the woman we love. For the most simple manifestation of tenderness, for a kiss given on returning from the garden, she was in the way.

Did Yseult know why the happiness of being Allan's wife made Camilla so sad? She did not ask her. People who have not common souls can understand each other, even when they are very distant. Camilla would have apprehended such a question. She fully recognised that she was not as happy as she had been, and as married, she thought to be. But had Allan done her any wrong —and he certainly had not—and had she loved her mother better than she did, she would not have confided her troubles to her. When a young woman accuses her husband in confidence to her mother, either she possesses a soul without nobility, or she loves him no longer.

Camilla still loved her spouse. She did not possess, as he did, that great imagination, which is only a source of eternal uneasiness, and perhaps the impossibility of loving long. Her feelings were all the more deep because they were in a very narrow compass. She had no ideas that did not belong to this sentiment. Like all women who are in love, everything bored her that did not pertain to her heart. Even books, where she would have

found sentiments analogous to hers, only seemed insipid pastime to pursue; and if her love, from which she awaited all delight, did not make her happy, what would be her resource henceforward?

There was none. She was married. Her life was finished. She had espoused the man she loved —who loved her too, at least so she still thought —and who placed under her feet the velvet mantle of his tenderness as homage to the queen of his life. Wrongly then, she imputed her fits of long and vague sadness to herself. She accused her own disposition. Her passionate soul desired a caress every moment, and she was ashamed of this longing. How many times, fainting with sensual ardour and pudicity, had she not leant her head on Allan's shoulder without saying a word? He left her so, not knowing how the woman was agitated, believing her only to be slightly moved; and if he placed his lips on her forehead, or in her hair, the chaste wife, beneath his mouth that hardly skimmed over her skin, did not persist.

She no longer asked Allan why he was sad. She was frightened lest he should answer with a "And why are you so dull?" when she would have nothing to say. Nevertheless, each day her uneasiness was more pronounced. She finished up by confess-

ing to herself that she was unhappy, and she sobbed that day as if she had made a discovery.

Now, pity Allan more than ever. Voluptuousness betrayed him, even as love had done. Up to then all the caresses with which he had cheated the truthfulness of his soul had been sincere; but now—no! He was driven into the corner where lurks deliberate falsehood. If he bent his oft humiliated pride to such mendacity, it was because, after all, he had loved the woman once; he had sworn before God to make her happy; and she was better than he. But generosity cannot last when one has to play a part. And besides, what use would that have been? Camilla was the dupe of false appearances, but when two lives have to be passed together, and one loves truly, can one be tricked for long?

Now that Allan dropped away more and more from Camilla, his thoughts went back involuntarily, as during the wedding night, to the time when he loved Yseult. Placed between these women, he felt emptiness reach him through both of them. Yseult asked him no more questions than did Camilla. Thus all three lived their own life apart, feeling that all the family ties that united them had been imperceptibly and secretly broken. There

was, therefore, less movement than ever in the marshy Château of the Willows. Soft and friendly words, spoken with cold and lying accents, and almost visible embarrassment; the fear of wounding each other's feelings—such was the result of the relationship of each hour. It was pitiable to see all these days drag slowly, one after the other, without bringing the least change. It was horrible to watch the interminable evenings in the drawing-room that Allan passed walking sadly up and down; while Madame de Scudemor smoothed her bands of hair on her furrowed and thin temples, and Camilla kept her eyes upon her work to hide the inflamed traces of the tears she had shed during the day, and which she did not dare to show, for fear she should be asked what had happened.

One night the windows were open to the last breeze and noises of the day. Madame de Scudemor, who was approaching the end of her pregnancy, was more ill and downcast than ever as she reclined upon her sofa; Camilla, more unhappy from her husband's frigidity, which, in spite of himself, began to pierce through their conjugal intimacy; and Allan was in an inconceivable state of fatigue and despair. The emptiness of his soul

horrified him. He wanted something to fill it. He desired anything, even had it been a crime or remorse; and he went first to one and then to the other of the two women, withered rinds that had fallen from his lips and his hands, and that he would still have picked up again if he could. But Camilla was the most tortured, in spite of the plenitude of her youth; and the most withered, in spite of all the splendour of her beauty, for she loved him.

The room was bathed in deep shadow. One could hardly distinguish Madame de Scudemor huddled on her sofa; Camilla, seated farther off, and Allan passing backwards and forwards between them, wrapped in his dull silence. The sea of light reflected from the moon, as red as a decapitated head rolling in a corner of the sky and illuminating the marsh, sent none of its ensanguined gleams in the drawing-room through the jessamine of the windows, though it could be seen rising in sinister fashion on the foggy horizon. The plaintive croaking of the frogs could be heard repeated at short intervals in the silence of the fens; such resigned but painful harmony. For the last few days Camilla had nurtured the thought, which would never have occurred to a

tender-hearted woman, that she had shown Allan too much love, and might exalt her husband's feelings if she hid her own a little more. With great trouble the poor coquette, in despair, had withdrawn into her shell; but Allan paid no attention to this change in his wife's manner. Everything that drew him away from her relieved him too well to make him risk the least observation of a nature to soften distant behaviour delivering him of her presence; and unfortunate Camilla, who was on live coals, hoping that her husband might address her with some kinder word and occupy himself a little more with her, had lost all the fruit of her cruel efforts.

"He takes no heed of anything," she said to herself. "Indeed, he loves me no longer."

And the tears she felt well up seemed to be formed of the purest blood of her heart. That evening, for the first time since her marriage, Allan had come into the drawing-room without going and kissing her. That simple circumstance had thrown her into a state of real despair. An insect skimming over a liquid surface suffices to make a brimming cup overflow.

At first it was only physical pain round the heart, the eyes remaining dry. Then came two

big and burning tears. Next, as she would have died if that state of paroxysm had lasted, sobbing overtook her, and with such violence that she was obliged, so as not to betray herself, to leave the *salon* and retire to her room. Nevertheless, Allan continued to walk up and down with his monotonous step. Madame de Scudemor remained in the same position. Allan had seen and heard nothing. At that moment hell was in his heart, the purgatory of passionately sensual men whose passion has departed, and who desire it again. He remarked with joy the flight of his wife when she was gone. She left him free, and impetuous and criminal thoughts seized upon his faculties and conquered his will. After a few moments' silence, he stopped, standing bolt upright in front of Madame de Scudemor. She could not see him, but his voice gave the key to what he felt.

"Yseult!" he said, in tones that came not from the throat, but from the chest, and with the subdued accents of a man afraid of what he is going to do. "Yseult!"

"What do you want of me, my child?" she replied.

"Why," said he sullenly, "do you call me child, when I am the father of yours?"

"Because," said she, with her unspeakable dignity, "I have never had but that name to give you."

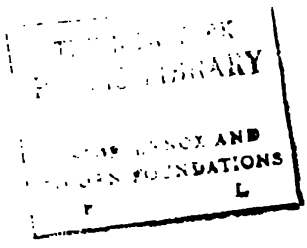
"You are right," he said, and he fell back on the sofa where she was seated, as if in despair.

"Are your sufferings greater this evening?" he asked her, after a fresh pause, as if he was ashamed of himself.

"Oh, Allan," she replied, with accents that she had never used when she spoke of herself, "it is not I who suffer most."

He understood, for he remained mute. But it was not Yseult's pity for her who was absent for the moment; it was not such divine pity that could drive back the torrent of fatal thought carrying Allan away, and giving him into the power of the arch-fiend.

He drew near to Madame de Scudemor, and roughly seizing her by the bosom, which resisted no longer as in bygone days, but which bent itself, soft and yielding, he sought for Yseult's mouth with his own lips in the dark. Yseult turned away her head. The kiss was lost in the little curls on the nape of her neck. Allan did not even press his lips heavily. Before he could have done so, he had felt that these vain approaches were fright-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"Because you did not come to me."

These words were pregnant with reproach which he did not understand. He could not realise that she should feel anxious about such a trifle.

"Calm your childish terrors," said he sulkily, "and go back to your room. I will come and join you there in a few moments."

"When you choose, my friend," she answered. "You are the master. Only pardon me for coming downstairs."

And she slowly turned to go, leaving the lamp on the table.

Her resignation touched him.

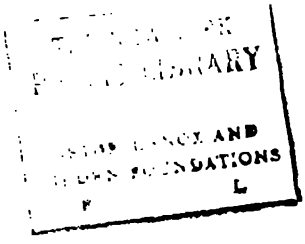
"Camilla," he said, as she was going, "are you off without wishing me good-night!"

She offered him her forehead like a little girl, and answered, keeping back her tears:

"But I shall not be asleep when you come up."

But these rapid movements of tender feeling wrought no change in the state of Allan's soul. On the contrary, they increased his anguish. He remembered that although he had taken charge of her life, he had neither the strength nor the will to make it a happy one.

"All this cowardly trickery weighs me down," he thought. "I must confess all to Yseult." And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feverishly he began to write to her, trying, like all men who are driven to desperation, to find relief in confession.

In this horrible letter he said:

"I have no fear of being hard on Camilla, as she loves me so much. I do not fear her despair! I only fear your scorn, Yseult! That is what keeps me from suicide. You who have suffered as much as I have, and are only a woman; you who by dropping a little opium in a teaspoon might have softly gone to sleep on your lace pillow during one of the evenings of your cruel days, not to wake next morn, and who did not do so, you would have the right to despise me if I killed myself. You are all my pride, Yseult! I have none but what is vested in you.

"I understand you now, Yseult! I understand the malady of not being able to love any more. You only appeared to me to be an unfortunate woman, but I know now to what extent. Experience, and not your words, has taught me. To suffer, when one loves, is sweet and good, for it is the happiness of martyrdom; but to suffer because we can no longer love, that is the misfortune of life. A very great misfortune, too, for one can

die of love, but not because we cannot love any more.

"Have you been like me, Yseult? Did you try again to love, and have you felt that you could not? Is that a transient state? Shall I be cured of it? Tell me! You are as calm as death, but did your last love make you so? Before you arrived at that tomb-like stupor, did you desire to love, and regret love, but all in vain? You never told me, Yseult! To be inert is to live, and that still means suffering; but not to wish to be inert, to struggle against the marble that mounts to your breast, and to feel that the stone is stronger than life itself, although it cannot stifle it—have you also suffered like that?

"If so, Yseult, it was not necessary that you should have struggled on my breast two hours ago. Your experience betrayed you. Fear overcame you, as if you were an ordinary woman. O, my great Yseult! I know not what brutal and sceptical instinct just now moved you. You who can no more be polluted, you who know that only the soul can be soiled, what did you fear? Had you no longer any more confidence in yourself? See, my arms have not yet finished their embrace. My lips only touched your hair. You are nothing now

to me, not even a woman. If you knew that, why did you tremble? How I hoped that all was not finished between us! I had thought so often of you, even on Camilla's bosom! I have been so often unfaithful to her in my memories of you, that I hoped I should find some emotion of the past by your side—the horrible happiness of guilt! But no! my heart and fate are inflexible. I sought for incest, and neither my soul nor my senses were strong enough to enable me to consummate it.

"Yseult, I am tired of your daughter. All her flesh is in my way as I inhale it by my side at night. It fatigues me to have to torture her whole soul by day. Alas! this lassitude is vain; I cannot abjure my hangman's trade for her. Her beauty has not guaranteed her. Yet you remember, Yseult, how formerly I loved all that was beautiful in you. You have nothing like that to-day. You are old. You are ill. You are about to become a mother. I do not love you any more than I do your daughter. Why, then, in the horror of my nothingness, did I return from your daughter to you? Miserable wretches that we are, we do not even know how to deceive ourselves! It seemed to me that my remembrances burnt me like fire; it was dark; I could not see you, Yseult. But my

mad sensuality could not be affrighted. Oh! if it had been in the daytime, if we could have seen each other, do you not think that we, knowing all about the heart and its incomprehensible limits, might have laughed in each other's faces?"

XVII.

This letter calmed Allan a little. He had said "us" to her whose noble misfortune he had so long respected, and the word "us" did him some good. It was a *ricochet* of vanity, and he was proud of the blow that had struck him down. Before falling so low he had had moral disgust of his sufferings; but now they seemed to him more poetical, and so they were in fact; the poetical side of human grief is its infinity.

But by lifting himself up to the level of Yseult; by looking at his situation, so long accursed, and at last accepted, with the eyes of pride having one common centre, all the generosity there was in his general behaviour towards Camilla disappeared. He forgot her, although she had not absented herself. Indifference is the absence of those who are there. Kind words and kisses become no more than the familiar commonplaces of a marriage without meaning or tenderness. If he had been hard to his wife, he ceased to be so. Indifferent people are so affable! Alas! that was all the more

cruel for her. But man has such need of sincerity in his life that sooner or later everything that he desires to hold secret is found out.

The last tears he shed were with Camilla, during a silent stroll. That day she wept like him, and neither one nor the other asked inwardly the reason of the mute weeping. No kiss wiped away the traces of the tears, and they did not even turn away their faces to mutually hide their grief. All questions were useless. They had loved each other, they were twenty, and had hardly been married a month! Which was the most unhappy of these two young people—the girl who knew she was no longer loved, or the youth who felt that he could no longer love in future?

But Allan could not detach himself quickly from the sensibility that was drying up within him, and he tried to cheat himself, although he did not seek refuge in love.

"At least," said he to Yseult, with whom he passed part of the day, forgetting his wife, who now only came down rarely into the drawing-room, "let us be friends by our thoughts, if we can no longer be so by the heart. Let us go through life in solitude, without asking more of that which it has not granted us. Let us judge

existence without reproaching it with our mistaken hopes. Like you, Yseult, I wish to accept this renouncement of all things which has dawned upon us earlier and more completely than is usual with the rest of mankind. Let us march like two brothers-in-arms through the battle of life, encased in the icy steel of our armour tempered by the anguish of experience, and remain friends and comrades in the same misfortune. Will you? That I once loved you, Yseult; that you were for me what the world calls a mistress—what matters it? That you are Camilla's mother—what matter once again? Let us rise superior to these broken ties in which our souls could not live. Let us leave to others, happier than ourselves, familiar respect and the religion of remembrance! Love has abandoned us, leaving us desolate and emptied of all that which it does not tear from others when they are abandoned as we are. But, Yseult, could you not be something more or less than you were for me formerly? Between a man and a woman is there only the relationship of lover and mistress? Is there not something greater and more beautiful? Can you not become my sister by your thoughts, as I am your brother by your sufferings? Can we not both find ourselves in that im-

mensity which belongs to us, and where is to be found reflection and grief? Because the heart has ceased to throb, because the organs have given way, because God has not willed that love should last out the life of man, must we cease to exist when love has left us? Is not our nature spiritual? Has intelligence no chaste embraces? Like our weak arms, is it tired of holding on to the goal to which it aspired, once it is attained? I know that this would not be happiness, but it would be a sadder state, more ideal, and full of pride. Men have no name for it because they ignore it. It means the union of two souls who have been truly tried in the comprehension of life. I have read somewhere, in the works of a great poet, a sentence worthy of the impure multitude; it is that those who have loved can no longer love each other when love has fled, and that the feeling which had given a share of heaven to two poor creatures was always followed by hatred, oblivion, or shame in their souls. Great Heaven, can this be true? Are there on this earth no women stronger, truer, and more sincere than cowardly courtesans with hearts of stone? Some only wear a mask, as at the opera ball, but these never take it off, and when they are bold enough to carry their ego on

their faces, are the apostates of all the feelings of love in a travesty of repentance and tinsel virtues. And should there be but one who is strong and true, Yseult, let it be you! Put this disinterestedness for all joys of the feelings between me whom you did not love and you who nevertheless gave yourself to me! Let us sign this bold pact of alliance, and give this example to the world! It will be stupid enough to be astonished, but it would be still more astonished if it knew to what love this intimacy was going to succeed, higher and rarer than sensuality! Perhaps it may even be calumniated. Man is so deeply vile that all actions he does not understand become villainous for him, because then he is always sure to understand them. But, insulted by society, we shall draw closer to each other, too old and too proudly careless to give ourselves airs of martyrdom beneath all these fingers of scorn pointed at us!"

But to this young man, fascinated by what seemed to be strength, the most beautiful thing on earth barring virtue, to this imagination of a poet, who spoke so ambitiously of giving a noble spectacle to the world, and who stood so high draped in solitary grief, amid the scornful groans of the crowd, the discouraged woman replied:

"What you propose to me is no longer possible, Allan. No, Allan, not even that—not even that! Oh, poet, you imagine that it would be more beautiful than love, this incomprehensible feeling, which should be no longer love, but which would be, believe me, still the desire of love—a mad desire, arising fatally from our greatest despair. When will the heart stop itself from giving birth to this eternal illusion? Do you not know that only sentiment draws one unto another? Why do you speak to me of thoughts? To think brings isolation and concentration. Thought is a two-handed sword that clears the air around one. My arm is too tired to lift that weapon. And besides, to be brother and sister as you said is still to love each other, and I know not how to. You are a man. You have active and fresh faculties. Mine are enervated, and could not rise to the haughty and sublime wisdom of which you dream. You are right, however, there is something imposing and sincere in the conduct of those females who cry aloud to society: 'I have been that man's mistress, and to be so no longer has not separated us. We have not done as those who furtively glide from the threshold of mystery into darkness, wiping their mouths with quivering hands, as there re-

mains some avengeful and shameful trace on the lips.' Alas! such a part, that at another period I might have been tempted to play, suits me no more. You have always presented me with an exaggerated portrait of myself, Allan, but you will finish by believing me to be what I really am!"

So she refused everything because she was capable of nothing. The last enthusiasm of man—the enthusiasm of pride—was broken against the stern reality of his misfortune. Having got so far, Allan was on the point of despising her, but he had not the courage to do so. Her devotion overawed him. Would Allan's scorn overwhelm wretched Yseult later on, to complete the sum total of bitterness that had poisoned her career, and show, once more, the innate and imperishable ingratitude of the human heart?

XVIII.

One night of summer and storm, when the heat was overpowering, and made sleep as deep as apoplexy, Allan rose in the darkness and sat himself to listen if Camilla by his side was really sleeping. Often he thought she was immersed in slumber when she was awake, sobbing in the dark. He called her several times, and with great precaution, and seeing that she was asleep, got out of bed, and dressed in all haste.

Mechanically he looked out of the window. The sky was copper colour, with heavy clouds in places, and every second or so a pale lightning flash showed itself quickly on the horizon, followed by a deep and low growling rumble. The willows of the marshes never moved. There was not a sound to be heard save the distant thunder. It was a solemn and anxious night for Allan, for as it came nearer the artillery of heaven might have woke Camilla. So he placed the pillows round his wife's face to intercept the noise of the storm. She was in danger of stifling with concentrated

heat beneath the pillows accumulated around her, and already abundant sweat ran down from her forehead. Allan felt his hand, that touched her face by accident, become quite moist, but he had no pity. He continued his arrangements, and drew the curtains of the bed and the windows, the gleam of the lightning not showing through the material of which they were made.

Then he went out of the room on tiptoe, like a criminal. He had already passed along, hiding himself in these long corridors by night, when the echo of his footstep made him shudder in spite of himself. But the actual state of his soul did not remind him of what he felt then. He opened the same door of which he had frequently turned the knob at such an hour, and went into Madame de Scudemor's room.

She was stretched upon the bed, a shawl negligently tied round her head, which was half-leaning out of the bed, and which he tried to lift up.

"Well?" said he, supporting her in fright.

"For the last four hours I have suffered atrocious pain. To suffer is nothing, but I tremble for this child's life. You must go and fetch a doctor!"

"A doctor?" he replied, with astonishment.

"Yes, a doctor, my friend," she continued. "I suffer so much that I have an idea the forceps must be used for my deliverance. Neither you nor I anticipated such a contingency, but that must not alarm us any more than if we had been prepared for it. In the neighbouring village there is a doctor who is well spoken of. He is a simple and tender soul. Go and fetch him quickly, and bring him here to me in secret."

Allan was about to obey, but he did not utter the thought that occupied his mind. Yseult guessed it as she looked at him.

"What!" she exclaimed. "Does your philosophy abandon you already? What has become of all the bold, manly words you so loudly enunciated the other day? Come, my friend, why do you trouble for me? What care I for the judgment of men? Do you think that I crave for anybody's opinion?"

"From you nothing astonishes me," answered Allan respectfully, and, after having kissed the moist, cold hand she tendered him, he went out with the same precautions as when he had entered.

It was something to rend the soul to see that woman writhing in agony during the long hours

of the night, and from whom, in her solitude, there escaped not a complaint. No one was there to surround her with the cherishing care that her state demanded; no one, not even a hired female, to replace the tumbled bedclothes or sloping mattress. She was abandoned by God and man! And if one of her maids had entered by chance, thinking that "Madame had rung," she would have wound the coverlet still closer round herself, and, forcing her distorted features to assume an expression of insignificant impassibility, she would have quietly said to the girl who might have relieved her, "No, I do not want you!" From time to time she stretched out her naked arm, and took from the night-table a phial, that she smelt so as not to faint away entirely. More than ever the deep, low growl of the thunder could be heard; and the lightning flashes, rapidly following one upon the other, continually dulled the weak and discreet flicker of the night-light, throwing a phosphorescent gleam on the bluish pallor of her face, which now only gave signs of life by the imprint of pain. Her blackened eyelids fell heavily, veiling her dulled eyes, and deep hollows surrounded her nostrils. It was a sight of proud awe—this silent struggle against pain; this torture between

four walls, while without Nature roared furiously. Creation, Immensity, Strength, and Eternity gave out their terrible groans; but the weak, feeble, mortal creature stifled all hers. The dumb, inward rendings of the woman were more majestic than those of the firmament.

Half an hour had passed when Allan returned with the doctor, whom he had with difficulty guided through the darkness of the staircases and corridors. The worthy man had been very surprised when he saw Monsieur de Cynthry come to fetch him at such an hour. But his timidity did not overcome his feelings of politeness, and he followed Allan without hazarding a question. The furtive manner with which he was introduced into the mansion showed sufficiently that reliance was placed on his discretion. But his astonishment was boundless when he approached Madame de Scudemor's bed; and Allan said to him, his downcast eyes full of suffering pride for Yseult:

"Here is the patient, sir."

Yseult lifted her heavy eyelids at the sound of his voice, but her eyes had lost their fixity. They were vague, as if extinguished, and seemed to swim in opaque moisture. She turned them towards the doctor and said to him:

"I returned from Italy *enceinte,* sir. I had to conceal my state from my daughter. My son-in-law, Monsieur de Cynthry, and you, whom I have sent for myself, are the only two persons to whom I have confided my secret."

And the simple way she spoke was so imposing that the doctor in his turn dropped his eyes beneath the glance of her pupils that looked without seeing. Yseult had a way about her which prevented vulgar-minded persons from showing their stupid contempt. With a word or a gesture, she placed herself in a twinkling far above every condemnation.

The warning presentiments of Madame de Scudemor had not deceived her. The *accouchement* threatened to be excessively dangerous. It was imperative to use the forceps.

A fit of nervous trembling overcame Allan as he leant against one of the bed-posts looking at Yseult, who was a prey to the most violent contractions; and when he saw the doctor take hold of the cold blue steel, he seemed to feel the bite of it. Instinctively he turned away his head. Yseult, judging his movement, said to him with her habitual smile:

"Allan, return to your wife's side. I am afraid

she may wake. The doctor is here. I do not want you now."

But Allan refused to leave her. He even desired to hold her and support her during the cruel operation. His breast became a cushion for her head, formerly so beautiful and so much loved, unrecognisable now through the hastening of age and anguish, but which at that moment showed such force of will that nothing would ever make him forget it. He was the cause of the suffering she endured. Each fresh spasm of pain brought him more remorse. Meanwhile, the tempest had reached its highest point of fury. The thunder rolled with frightful noise. The sky seen through the casement was black, and wind and rain raged furiously. The time passed. Yseult's strength was gradually becoming exhausted, and the child came not. The doctor, with swollen forehead, on which the veins stood out in relief, bent over until his head almost touched Madame de Scudemor's bosom, and as pale as she, went on with his work, affrighted, as it were, at such resistance as he more rapidly attacked the rebellious organism.

"Well, sir?" Allan said, now and again to the doctor, who answered not, who did not raise his head, but nodded uneasily. Suddenly he stopped,

as if struck with an idea. He was discouraged. He looked at Allan with a fatal look, and made a step to lead him out of Yseult's hearing.

"I understand you, sir," said Allan. "If there is a determination to be taken, kill the child and save the mother!"

But already Yseult had risen up amidst the blood-stained sheets where she was lying, pale and inanimate. She had found strength to do so.

"'Tis I who should die!" she cried, and her movement was impetuous, while her brow was lit up with sudden joy.

She fell back, repeating once more with emphasis:

"'Tis I who should die!"

"That is the cry of a mother!" said the doctor to Allan, this astonishing energy in the midst of the universal break-up of the organs having deceived the man of science. The poor man could see nothing more than the sentiment of maternity. Alas! it was the cry of a miserable woman, which for Allan summed up her entire existence. He had not the courage to oppose Yseult's desire, thinking that he had not the right to deprive her of this last hope of liberty. Perhaps he, too, was thinking of her child? Be that as it may, he an-

swered the doctor, whose inquiring glance was still fixed upon him:

"Do as she wishes!" And he hid his face in his hands.

The doctor reflected for a moment, then as each instant wasted put two lives in danger, instead of one, he set to work again. He was a long time. But at last the child sprang into the world, in a wave of its mother's blood.

She had fainted away entirely. Allan, whose sensations were unspeakable, with features that he tried to keep calm, received in his arms the child that was his, but whom he dared not kiss. He plunged it in the basin, where the doctor poured tepid water. He wiped it and wrapped it in a silken mantle that Yseult had forgotten the evening before on the back of an arm-chair. The unhappy father, to give the first kiss to his child, was obliged to watch lest the doctor, busy caring for Yseult, should see him.

Nevertheless, Madame de Scudemor little by little regained her senses. Scarcely had she opened her eyes than she said to the doctor:

"Is the child dead, since I am alive?"

"No, madame," he replied, "the infant is not dead."

And Allan, with tears in his eyes, placed it on its mother's bed.

"Oh, sir," returned Madame de Scudemor, with a sad expression of regret, "has your talent surpassed your fears?"

"Madame," replied the doctor, beginning to understand the despair of consummate misfortune where he had only seen maternal instinct, "do not reproach me. I have done as you wished."

Yseult thanked him with a graceful and tender smile of gratitude. She breathed more freely now, as she felt the hook of life that had so long wounded her flesh dropping away from her, as well as the tunic of existence too narrow for the powerful dilatation of her soul. She knew she had received her death-wound. And the good doctor understood perhaps that it was not the mother who had asked to die!

XIX.

Day began to break, and the last shower of the storm was spent. A rosy light covered the sky on the side opposite to the sun, which showed the half of its globe on the horizon. A few clouds, carried away by a fresh breeze, let vague and distant resounding sounds escape from their flanks, as when pain is past with us a few sighs yet remain. On the road to Sainte-Mère-Eglise, the wheat-ears, soaked with the rain, sparkled in the first rays of the sun, forming a kind of sea of light with smiles in the undulations of its waves. Nature resembled a woman stepping out of her bath, and twisting her hair, still bedewed with foam, which she lets drip in the palms of her tightened hands. The perfume of thyme floated in the air refreshed by the storm. At this matutinal hour, when sound carries farther perhaps than at night, the cocks could be heard crowing in the most distant dwellings. The tramp—the nomad of impotent civilisation—left the barn, where an asylum had been granted him the evening before—and

closing without noise the gate of the farmyard, took to the road, of which the rain had darkened the reddish hue, before the country folk had recommenced their daily tasks.

At that moment, Allan, lying by the side of Camilla, thought of Yseult, whom he had been forced to leave by herself to return to his wife, from whom he was obliged to conceal everything. He had learnt from the doctor, whom he had conducted to the gates of the Château, that Yseult's death was not imminent, thanks to the strength she possessed, and that her life might be prolonged a few days. This consideration only—and not the commands of Madame de Scudemor—had made him decide to leave her and return to his wife's room. By the most lucky chance, she had not woke.

The rest that Yseult required so much after such violent shocks was only the atony of fatigue. When daylight began to drown the yellow flame of the night-light in its white and brilliant splendour, she looked sweetly, if not tenderly, at the child resting on her breast. It was a girl. She would have preferred a son; for she knew that the strongest women always succumb in their struggle with society—heroines conquered by numbers.

"Did I possess the superstition of blessings," she thought, "I would bless you, oh, my daughter, for having condemned me to death by your birth!"

That day and the following ones it was known at the Willows that Madame de Scudemor was so ill that she was obliged to keep to her bed. Her ladies' maids performed their duties round her; Camilla herself came often to see her in the daytime, and nobody guessed that a child was there asleep, hidden beneath its mother's counterpane. When the infant was about to awaken, Yseult soon found some pretext for getting rid of the people in her room. Her habitual manner, serious and reserved, did away with all suspicion. The doctor who had delivered her was sent for officially. He told Camilla that her mother was dangerously ill, but without entering into details.

It was Allan who passed most of his time with the patient. He remained obstinately by her side, inventing all kinds of pretexts, although she insisted that he should leave her when the others did. If Camilla had not been engrossed with the despairing thought that her husband no longer cared for her, what would she have thought to see Allan incessantly at her mother's bedside, and she always wishing to suffer in solitude, ever trying to

drive him from her presence? But Allan, who had so much deceived her, was now tired and careless, no longer possessing the sad courage of prudence. He little cared for whatever might befall. "All will come to a crisis," he said to himself, and he did not recoil from that contingency which up to now he had looked upon with fright. He would willingly have confessed all to Camilla. And if he was silent, if he still took precautions, it was for the sake of Yseult; it was for Camilla, it was through fearing to sully the relationship existing between mother and daughter; but most certainly he did not wish to screen himself.

Nevertheless, as the state Madame de Scudemor was in was full of danger that the doctor did not seek to dissimulate, and as she required some one to sit up with her at night, Allan told his wife that he would watch by her mother's side.

"For your mother," he said to her, "I ought to do what you would do yourself, were you not in a position that calls for the greatest care."

He wished to allude to her pregnancy, and he had not the courage to speak otherwise about it. Was he not a happy husband? not daring to talk to his pregnant wife about the child she carries in her womb, between two kisses, making use of a

charming babble of pet names during these divine familiarities. Allan spoke about it in good taste as might a stranger. Camilla, indifferent to every decision since she had discovered that her husband loved her no more, seemed to find his conduct quite natural, and did not venture to put the least question. The unhappy woman perhaps thought that during her nights of solitude she would be more free to weep.

Allan therefore sacrificed his repose to Yseult. He nursed her in the sick-room as if he was a tender woman and not a man. It is true that he could thus enjoy without disguise the delight of being a father. The weight of his daughter upon his knees caused him to support fatigue more easily. The pity he felt for Yseult was lost in his incessant and dumb contemplation of the little creature, and her mother was forgotten. The last scrap of sentiment of the man who had adored her was torn from Yseult by her child. More than once from her bed, looking at him in the light of the burning embers, leaning over the face of the sleeping babe, that idea came to her, and she never even heaved a sigh.

Yseult's child was brimming over with life. She belonged to the same strong breed as her mother.

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"And you, too," she said to it one evening, as she rolled it in its swaddling clothes, "will not be broken down with grief in a day!"

Allan admired his daughter's beauty; for already one could guess that she would be as lovely as all those who—mysterious law of Nature!—are the offspring of furtive and guilty unions. Why is it, then, that what men sully produces what is most beautiful in this world?

Allan was on his knees on the carpet at the side of Madame de Scudemor's bed. The shawl that was round Yseult's head had come undone by the movement she had made in lifting up her child. Her tresses, so long and so thick, of which the brilliant blackness had faded away beneath the great and inflexible pallor of age that invades the brow and mounts higher, were now as grey as twilight, and they fell with sad melancholy over her shoulders as if weeping for her.

"She will soon do without me," she said to Allan, showing him the child clinging to her withered breast. "In two or three days' time you will carry her to some wet-nurse in the neighbourhood, who will give her something better than this scarce milk of an exhausted breast. You will watch over her, Allan, for I see that you love her already,

and may you feel this affection for her for many a long day yet!"

"Do you believe," replied Allan, "that one can ever be estranged from one's own child, when once one has begun to love it?"

"We can become estranged from everything," she answered. "I began by loving Camilla. She was not the fruit of solitary voluptuousness. Camilla's father was loved by me. But a last love, more devouring than all the rest, made me curse the day when Camilla came into the world. Do you know that often with Octave, when he whispered those things to me, which are nothing, but which go to make up the intimacy of life; and when I saw him pass his fingers through my daughter's hair, I was forced to struggle against myself in most abominable fashion lest I crush her innocent head on the pavement! Since then, when my love for Octave died out like all the other loves, as I told you, all my power of affection was destroyed. But even had it not been so, affection is not a chain that can be broken and taken up again at will. I call you to witness—you, Allan, who have loved me!—could you love me again a second time? No! when we separate, it is for ever, and all farewells are eternal. Why, then, Allan,

may not this child one day become odious in your sight? Why might she not become indifferent to you? A new love may spring up in you, and then how would the most adored child weigh in your heart against the absorbing love that would come and fill up every cranny?"

"Love? No, no!" murmured Allan, for he dared not affirm it in the presence of the woman whose daughter he had loved in spite of so much unavailing torture.

"You are still so young, my son," continued Yseult, "and we often think the heart dead when it is only slumbering. But do you not deceive yourself perhaps, for is not fatherly affection quite as fickle as all other love? And is it not set down in the destiny of mortals," she added, leaving the impress of her nails upon her forehead, "that all that makes us happy cannot last?"

Allan did not reply to these fatal words, but in his soul there was an echo that spoke for him.

"And you are not bound to believe me, Allan," she went on, "but these are awful feelings of fright, either instinctive or the outcome of experience, never deceiving those whom they warn. Have they ever deceived you? You loved Camilla and

she loved you. Well, then, did you not feel that love slipping away from you? Did not your happiness dry up quicker than a drop of dew in the sun? You tightened your embrace, but you could not hold back departing love. And you dived down deeper and deeper into the midst of caresses, until the day at last arrived when there was not a smile on your lips, and the caress in which you wished to forget yourself entirely came no more to your arms.

"Do not hang your head like that, Allan! I do not accuse or complain, either in my daughter's name or mine. I pity you, you who no longer love her; but I pity her still more, she who loves you, and who is no longer loved. You wrote to me that the only thing you feared in this world was my scorn. Do you not know, boy, that where there is grief, it is impossible for a woman to feel scorn?

"Men are not like that. When they despise they kill, and finish off the suffering woman. You are a man, Allan. Have you not often blushed to inspire that pity, which is the sublime or miserable scorn of woman, and which men understand so little that they only accept it as an insult?

"Before you confessed it to me, Allan, I knew

that you did not love my daughter any more. I recognised in you, alas! the history of everything that is human. You despised poor humanity, but let us absolve and weep for the person who suffers from this scorn! That is what I said to myself. My pity was still vivacious and indestructible. It was so strong, Allan, that on your wedding day, seeing you gloomy and pale at the altar, I guessed at what you afterwards thought you revealed to me. I perceived that this marriage was an iron yoke beneath which you bent your head, and the thought struck me that I could break it with a word. The sight of Camilla stopped me; for this word, if spoken for you, would have struck her down in the midst of her joy. She was the weakest. She was guilty in the eyes of the world. She did not possess bold strength with which to affront bitter scorn. And you, with her or without her, Allan, would you be more happy? Such was the terrible combat that was tumultuously agitating my soul, but which resulted in the victory of the weakest—of her who has since been abandoned! My pity conquered my pity, and I turned my head away not to hear the blessing which the priest often thrusts upon two souls as if it was the knife of a sacrifice; and in my horror of fate, I let

the seal of what is irrevocable fall upon your lives, where the hand of man trembled not as he wrote the name of God, because what was more irrevocable than this sacrilegious law was the misfortune that awaited both of you!"

"And it came," said Allan, "sparing neither of us!"

He hid his face in Yseult's bedclothes, as if seeking to escape from the inevitable yoke of which he complained.

"Yes! it came," rejoined Yseult, passing her long fingers in the curly locks of her son-in-law. "But as you love your child, Allan, you have now an interest in life, and in the fight against destiny all is not yet lost for you. Even if it was, Allan, I would try to encourage you, and elevate you in your own eyes. You are a man; you should be greater than Yseult, whose heart failed her. Be a man, then, and show that you have that strength which poor women lack!"

"Why this prayer to me?" said Allan, lifting his head with a nervous vibration in his voice.

Then they looked at each other like the augurs staring, unable to keep up mutual deceit.

She did not smile, but dropped her eyes without answering.

"Pity! Always pity!" exclaimed Allan, after a pause, with his voice broken at the thought that had answered for her. "Always the execrable impotency of pity! Spare it me! I am tired of it! Speak not to me of grandeur, Yseult! Look you—I should not believe you. Your voice dies away on your lips. Your hollow words, without conviction, form naught but vain and sterile sounds. I should not believe you more than you would believe yourself! In the name of what would you persuade me? In the name of pride? You do not believe in it. In the name of God? Unhappy woman, you do not believe in Him either! What becomes of human greatness when God and pride no longer exist in us, and we are left in darkness? Something devoid of sense, Yseult, more stupid in your mouth than in mine—intolerable derision!"

"You have spoken truly!" she answered, and she fell back, overburdened, her hair straggling over the pillows where she dragged her heavy head, twisting her tresses round her stretched neck like cables eaten away by sea-salt after a shipwreck.

"Behold!" she added, in the most frightful tone of her colourless voice, clutching her child that she held to her breast, and tearing it away with the noise of interrupted suckling so abruptly that

the nipple was encircled with pink blood and discoloured, while the babe rolled to the foot of the bed. "And since I can do nothing for you, may this stupid and cruel pity be accursed! Leave me, and let me die!"

XX.

But neither that night nor the following ones did Allan obey the despairing commands of Madame de Scudemor, and she did not repeat them. She suffered him to watch by her bedside, give her to drink now and again, and lift her up in her bed, which each day became harder and more comfortless. She paid this physical care with soft and discouraged thanks, but otherwise she remained silent. What could she tell him now? Everything had been said. Her words had fallen upon his heart as if they had been heavy stones. On the other hand, perhaps the pain she was in had caused her to withdraw within herself. All suffering, even the least noble, causes isolation in sturdy souls.

Her malady took a turn for the worse. The doctor had spoken to Camilla of the dismal outlook. She did not realise what was killing her mother, but she could see that she was about to pass away. One evening she kissed the cold and clammy hand of Yseult with the tender respect

that we feel for the dying, and retired to her room, in obedience to Allan's wish, as he had a presentiment that the night would be the last he would pass at the side of the bed, whence a foretaste of the odour of the grave was exhaled already from every breath of the dying woman. The air of the room was suffocating with feverish heat, and as Allan feared that this vitiated atmosphere might be mortal for the delicate flower of a few days of age, for the poor babe breathed with difficulty, so heavy was it for its young lungs, in the stifling bedclothes of its mother, that he tore it from her side and carried it to the window, which he opened. The yellow jessamine gave out its southern perfume. The country was hushed in repose. The stars might have been heard to shudder in the deep air of night, if their twinkling had not been as silent as happy thoughts. It was peaceful night such as might bring relief in the eternity of all things. Allan seemed to draw life for the fragile infant from God's divine reservoir, the beautiful blue lake in which swam all sleeping nature; and the child, in the bosom of the blossoms and on the muscular chest of its father, received a baptism of strength and life in the mysterious effluences that come invisibly from heaven.

In the silence, Yseult's breath dragged slowly, with a rattle in the throat. The fecund dew in which Allan bathed his daughter, and in which nature was rejuvenated, had perhaps moistened the darkened brow of the dying woman, which was painfully perspiring with the sweat of the supreme moment, like oil used by the athlete for the last combat in the great arena of death; or mayhap it brought the relief of ephemeral freshness to the burning ardour of the veins of her temples, which, once blue, grew blacker every instant. Allan did not even give that a thought. He drenched his tiny girl with the pure air, with the softness of the night, with floral perfume and caresses, while the mother was expiring at the other end of the room, and, in the egotism of his paternal feelings, he did not even think of gathering for the mother a bunch of the balmy jessamine which, placed upon the lips of the dying creature, would have brought her some sweet and soft sensation in a moment when all was anguish and torture.

Suddenly Yseult called him. He went to her, after having placed his daughter on the sofa, surprised that she should have regained the consciousness that he thought was lost. She supported herself on her elbow—the position of her whole life

since passion had ceased to agitate her; since from the four cardinal points no breeze had sprung up to play round the prostrate column. She resembled the satiated guest of antiquity, about to quit the banquet. But the poison that had been drained to the dregs was spreading, like mortal hemlock, in greenish, mobile shades on the surface of the bosom that had imbibed it from within.

"Allan, Allan, listen to me!" she said to him, "for I know I am dying. Men believe that the desires of those about to die are sacred. If you think so, too, listen to me! Do not give my name to my daughter. I will not have my remembrance live after me. I do not wish you ever to speak to her of her mother. I do not ask this for me, but for her. Let my daughter despise me, my scorn hurts me more than hers can ever do; but for her sake, in God's name! if you possess the happiness of believing in Him, never cause her to blush and suffer by sometimes speaking of me."

"What an unfathomable abyss is your brain!" rejoined Allan, taking the hand that she extended towards him. "Ah! Yseult, Yseult, creature of one long and continued sacrifice, who has the right to despise you in this world?"

"I myself!" she answered, with a tone of harsh-

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ness. "The approach of death throws a new and unexpected light on the past, till then so badly judged by us. For the last three days you thought I was downcast, but inwardly I was passing in review my whole life. I had no mercy for my own existence. Not one of the incidents of my miserable career escapes my heart-felt scorn. Vainly in love, as when love had fled, did I always sacrifice myself. In vain was I always good and kind, when I could no longer be loving. It was not sufficient that instinctive compassion always dictated my resolutions. Doubtless there is something more perfect than such sacrifice, since it never absolves us in our own eyes!

"But what more do I mean to say?" she repeated, with thoughtful anxiety, not feeling great pain, but in deeply touching tones, leaving her hand in Allan's and only looking into her soul with a glassy stare. "How do you call that unattained goal, which one has sought, and which one thinks one has reached long ago? Is it the irony of fate? or a punishment of Providence? Tell us which is stupid and which mocks us? 'Tis I who blaspheme; for there is a world of sinners—so speak those who have faith—reconciled with themselves; souls who believe that they are par-

doned in their heart of hearts; creatures who have taken tranquil refuge in the loyalty of their intentions. There exist many such. I might have been counted among them once, when pity swayed me as love had done; when I immolated my pride each time that there was some grief to be appeased. I have known the peace that escapes me now. And if it abandons me this day, is it because death has inflicted fresh imbecility upon me?

"Oh, Allan! there are mysteries that the thoughts of men try to fathom, but, womanlike, I have sounded none of these depths, and have learnt and discovered nothing. I have passed over the ocean of life of which I have drunk the foam and the salt, and never once have I cast my torn nets to the bottom of its waters, for I knew they would bring me up no joy, no hope. I know not what lies on the other side of the grave, but I have no fear. At this moment why does my pity seem as paltry and vile now as it formerly appeared to me great and good? Why do I grant no quarter to this irresistible instinct that I so long thought was generous? Why do I hurl insult at it on my last day? My soul is firm enough yet not to reject the affronts that society flings at pure intentions. Let them call me a prostitute if they choose! They

have not guessed at my love; they have not seen the pity that carried me, wandering, into the arms of cowardly and inexorable men. Without an effort to rebel, I accept the searing epithet that sums up my life. Why, then, now, do I strike and abjure my pity? Ah! if instead of dying as I do I was forced to begin life over again, what would remain for me without my pity? What a bitter thing is this ignorance! Not to believe any longer in what directs our lives, to vainly seek for some other motive in the darkness of dumb conscience, and to punish oneself by remorse and cold scorn for not having been able to find it!"

Yseult's grief was almost sacred. She rose above herself. Allan remembered the time when he had called her a superior being. He saw now to what is reduced the superiority of woman, who never possesses but the faculty of feeling, and is always its victim, in virtue as well as in happiness. This something that had escaped Yseult, when the reed on which she leant had pierced her hands, did not escape him. In this solemn moment he realised, as if by sudden intuition, what the austerity of existence ought to be. Thus the man was born again, while the woman died in his stead.

Silently he took her hand, and wished for her

sake that death, whose impress was marked upon her face, would come and put an end to moral suffering for which he knew no relief. During the agitation of her last words, Yseult had moved round on her bed. More and more did her voice find difficulty in issuing from her throat. Her eyes had fled high up beneath the lids. Her limbs were racked by convulsive stiffness, and in the midst of this last cruel agony, she still spoke:

"If I lived my life over again, this twice-accursed pity, useless to those for whom the sacrifice is made, having nothing of the holiness of simple duty for those who are in receipt of it, I would still obey my involuntary compassion, and again I should fall under the ban of my own scorn. If God were to say to me: 'Here is the unknown goal!' placing it in His infinite mercy within my reach, I should not listen to God Himself, and like a madwoman I would take refuge in that pity which is no virtue, but which was my only one. Oh, woman! what are we, since we cannot amend our weakness? We despise ourselves, and we do not repent!"

Her voice gave way with these last few words. Her breathing could scarce be heard. The outside silence of the night invaded the room. Even the

babe on the sofa slumbered in peaceful repose. Allan stood up near the dismal couch, like a priest; but there are souls to which pious assistance is needless, and for which all human religions, love, friendship, respect, and remembrance are powerless as the very religion of God. He fastened his gaze upon the livid face, where already, mingled with the sweet brightness of an alabaster complexion, touched with a timid shade of pink, could be seen arising the ghastly violet tint of approaching decomposition. Then he turned his eyes, as if to purify them, towards the sky, which could be seen through the open window, of such fresh azure as if it had just bloomed forth that very instant like one of the great nightshades of the garden. He could better understand the cult of the Invisible. Yseult, although her face was turned towards the casement, never once lifted her eyes to this beautiful sky. She died without poetry, as she had lived, never guessing that Nature could still be loved when the exhausted heart loved nothing any more. Nature decorated the deathbed of the woman who had not known her with all her serenity; with perfume, silence, and shadow. Suddenly through immense and diaphanous space midnight rang out at the spire of a church of a parish not

far away. The light and tinkling hours were struck and faded away in the deadened atmosphere of that echoless night, when, led on by some unknown vague and fatal uneasiness, Camilla entered Yseult's room. Was it the presentiment of her mother's death agony alone that had troubled her in her sleep?

Allan, as he saw her come in, grew no paler. His look, that had glanced with prouder and purer thoughts from the bed of the dying woman towards the eternal firmament, fell upon Camilla and remained fixed. No trace of horror was visible on his brow, which had the autumnal hue of suffering about to finish. He remained calm, as during her life the woman who was dying for him had been. For the first time, leaning against that bedstead, he felt himself strong, inspired by the whole of a destiny that he accepted, and as tender as the soul that accepts it. But Camilla scarcely saw him. On the threshold her glance had fallen on the child, sleeping in the wadded folds of a coverlet of pink satin, like an antique Cupid in its shell of mother-o'-pearl.

She uttered a heart-rending shriek, and then rushed to her mother's bed, where, with both hands, seizing the dying woman by her long hair,

she lifted her up in that way, despite Allan's efforts to make her let go, and pointing to the slumbering infant:

"If you be not dead, Yseult," howled the impious girl, "answer me! Whose child is that?"

The pain that cruel Camilla caused her drew not a cry from Yseult. She opened her eyes, and there was no anger in them as she replied:

"It is mine."

"And who else, lying woman?" rejoined with rage the betrayed and jealous wife.

Yseult, on the point of death, had strength enough to distinctly pronounce the name of one of her lackeys.

"That is not true," said Allan, in a melodious voice. "You have guessed aright, Camilla. The child is mine."

At this confession of her husband, the wretched woman rolled over in a heap, unconscious, on the carpet. But her hands, entangled in her mother's hair, dragged down Yseult's feeble head, and caused it to hang from the bed towards the ground. Allan tried to unclasp her fingers. He never succeeded. He was forced to cut away Yseult's tresses with a pair of scissors. As he lifted her back on the bed, she said to him:

"Look after *her* sooner than me!" Her speech was almost unintelligible, and she could not finish the sentence.

Then, when he had lifted her who had passed away, he did the same for her who had fainted. Camilla soon came to her senses. When she reopened her eyes, she saw her husband standing near her, having thrown a sheet over Yseult's dead face, and she caught sight of the shorn tresses scattered on the ground. She was seized with sudden bitterness as she looked upon all this.

"You had ceased to love me!" she said to Allan, with anguish. "Now you will hate me!"

And she began to weep. He did not answer her, but he kissed her on the forehead. It was a kiss of peace that he gave her with fresh, full lips. She felt it as a punishment. It was not even an effort for him, but only good feeling. When he had kissed her, he returned to Yseult's bed, sat down near it, and continued to watch by her side. He did not tell his wife to go, and she remained. The lamp soon went out, and the rest of the night dragged slowly on, black and silent.

When day broke, the awakened child cried in its coverlet of pink satin. Camilla, huddled in the spot where Allan had placed her after he had lifted

her up, was still in the same state of stupefied insomnia, and never turned at the cry of the weeping infant. The entrails of the father hearkened better. He rose, and took the tiny creature, who vainly sought for the breast on its father's chest. It was a strange sight to see the man holding the child. He carried it from the unwholesome and evil-smelling room where its mother had shortly ceased to live. Camilla followed him, her head bowed down, and in silence, downcast and dumbfounded, as she went back over that threshold which she had crossed rapidly, to make her terrible apparition. A few hours had sufficed for this change in her.

EPILOGUE.

ALLAN TO ANDRÉ D'ALBANY.

"Château of the Willows.

"You know my story, André. It will help you to understand what I was, and what I have become. It will help you to put yourself in my place, and comprehend my disposition. You asked for it frankly, and I told you. For your sake I conquered the repugnance that one always has when recurring to a period in one's life where one has been weak and guilty. I was most deplorably both. But, my friend, I care little for the revolt of vanity, because, if there exists modest pride disdaining to persecute passers-by with miseries to be pitied or admired, I think that we owe our life, in all its bearings, to our fellows. Who knows but what in the most obscure and apparently most useless life God has not placed some great and mysterious lesson?

"When, nearly two years ago, I made your acquaintance, André, and you came towards me,

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ALLAN TO ANDRÉ D'ALBANY.

"Château of the Willows.

"You know my story, André. It will help you to understand what I was, and what I have become. It will help you to put yourself in my place, and comprehend my disposition. You asked for it frankly, and I told you. For your sake I conquered the repugnance that one always has when recurring to a period in one's life where one has been weak and guilty. I was most deplorably both. But, my friend, I care little for the revolt of vanity, because, if there exists modest pride disdaining to persecute passers-by with miseries to be pitied or admired, I think that we owe our life, in all its bearings, to our fellows. Who knows but what in the most obscure and apparently most useless life God has not placed some great and mysterious lesson?

"When, nearly two years ago, I made your acquaintance, André, and you came towards me,

impelled by all the force of a sympathy which would have made me upbraid myself if I had not replied by the same kindliness, you believed, as you since told me, that I was unhappy through some betrayed or misjudged passion; and you, on whom love and marriage had poured out their double felicity, showed attachment for which I should still be thanking you, if I had not already learnt sufficiently that we know not what we do when we form attachments. The extreme coldness of my manner did not repel you. You obstinately continued your amiable pursuit, and in good faith; so that it was more eloquent still than striking service rendered, and in men of your stamp proves a great deal more. Such persistence, coupled with what you possess so excellently, André—the liberal judgment that reckons up men and things in such a large-souled way; the straightforwardness and powerful simplicity that gives you, even in your frock-coat, and with the colourless bearing of our modern society, something of the physiognomy of Plutarch's heroes—made me at last reply to your generous advance. We met in Paris, in society. By a lucky hazard, we are neighbours in Normandy. We met nearly every day, and we became bound by one of those manly

friendships scorning mere words, which all remain at the bottom of the heart, and which old age will not cause to crumble away.

"Up to now, my dear André, you knew nothing of me but my opinions, and although generally opinions are the moulds of our lives, what is true for nearly all was far from being so in my case. Thus, firstly, you judged that I was unhappy through love, but as you grew to know me better you soon began to doubt that, as my way of looking at this sentiment seemed to you so different from what you expected. And my views appeared so strange that, not knowing what to make of your personal observation, you attacked this big question without uneasiness or beating about the bush, authorised, however, by your long friendship.

"I lived four years by the heart alone. I have narrated to you all the feelings of those four years, Albany. It is not a very novel tale, and the whole may appear vulgar; but it is life, as life is laid out. What is less common, certainly, is Yseult. I am astonished myself that, after having loved her with so much idolatry, I should have got to love Camilla. But since my second love has perished like the first; now that in the background of the past I only see when I turn back the tall and pale figure

of the mother, veiled for a moment by the daughter who reappears—not causing me emotion, but to awaken remembrance—is it temerity to think that the life of my heart is finished, and that my passions satiated and struck with death are exhausted?

"To tell the truth, that is not what the prophetess I so long misjudged, and whose redoubtable divination I recognised later, told me before she died. She predicted that I should love again. But doubtless she was mistaken on account of my youth. She had lived faster, when the sap of thought and feeling that circulated within her dried up at the foot of the wounded tree. She could not imagine that at twenty-three I could be what she was not at thirty. In this forwardness there was something that made my misfortune greater and longer than hers, and which she could not foresee. It was not the vanity of grief that made me think as I did; but does not despair exaggerate as well as hope? She did not know that there was a life that had been eaten up quicker than hers—the life of him who had looked upon her dying!

"I must confess to you, Albany, that this death had an enormous influence upon me. Perhaps I

might have had renewed taste for the deceiving joys of the heart, and asked again of youth for some of those illusions of which it is rare that one seeks to cure oneself, although they kill. But Yseult's last moments suppressed even the vaguest appetites that lived, unknown to me, in the most unexplored corner of my heart. Up till then, I had been a man of sensual passion—voluptuous like that wretched woman, who, when her passions were dead, became nothing ever after. I can hear her asking me what could guide our lives, since the goodness of the soul, that pity she thought sublime, suddenly sufficed no longer to bring her absolution! As for me, I did not reply to her doubting ignorance seeking with obstinate hands to clutch at a straw in the empty immensity. I answered not, but I saw a glimmering. A strange light flashed across my soul—and for the first time! Do you know what it was, Albany? It was the intuition of duty.

"From that day forward, my friend, I became a man. But this idea, that had germed in my soul at Yseult's discouraged voice, I did not pluck out to give her. The answer to the doleful query, a thousand times repeated, I kept to myself. Would she have understood it if I had let it out? And

even if she had not blindly repelled it, would it not have torn her being like a sharp, cold steel? The evil was irremediable. I held my tongue and let her shriek and die. Since then, I have reproached myself for this conduct. Although doubting to be understood by her, I ought to have spared her no pain. I acted as she had done all her life. But morality does not mean, as is said, that we must not impose suffering. It is good that suffering should be inflicted! Let tears flow! Nothing is useless in His presence. And life, not only in us, but in others, and everywhere, has only been granted to us to be squandered for noble aims.

"Since then, my dear André, I have reflected on this notion of duty, which spread its calm light in the night of my soul, like a pure beacon lit up from the funereal torch of a deathbed. I disengaged my idea from all that did not strictly belong to it, resolved to make it predominate over my life. Ah! my friend, I found much resistance, many a murmur, and often the blood that I thought had left me started running through my veins once more. Remembrance spoke up loudly. Regret more loudly still. The infinite thirst of felicity imperiously asked to be quenched, but ashamed of my guilty youth, and believing no longer in love, I

sought refuge in the unbreakable idea, and it did not give way as I frantically clutched it. Alas! I deserved less credit than those whose struggles had been tenaciously incessant; for my heart was a desert. The neigh of desire no longer troubled my intelligence, and could not drag it from this great abstraction of duty, incomprehensible for too passionate natures. What hindered my stoical progress was the broken, bloody chain that clanked behind me—those memories linked one within the other like rings of bronze, and which I was condemned to drag along. I could forget nothing. When feet are burnt by lava, the imprints remain when it has grown cold and hard; but on the lava of my soul, the foot burns, and its impress never grows cold! I knew that all was irrevocably finished. I would not have had it otherwise, and nevertheless there would come rushing back in my thoughts, like a cavalry charge, all the details of those days of torrid and destroying voluptuousness, and which, in reality, could never return to me. My imagination, by which I had so energetically lived, persecuted me with its salacious pictures, as if saying: 'Beyond the pale of my empire all is chaos!' That is the malady of the passions—their inevitable poison. At last their influence fades.

We are cured, and all is well. The soul has ceased to feel that activity which is so absorbing that our life is destroyed without regret, for has not He said that all happiness shall be shortlived, while man's remembrance of it shall be infinite?

"It was loudly said that I was a born poet. It is true that imagination was my best developed faculty. I had more than one battle with it. If that makes me a philosopher, I accept the title or the insult. But I felt also that I could never be anything else. It is fatal that once we have been rendered happy by the soul, spiritual predominance occupies all our thoughts, and for evermore we ask why we can only be happy in the same way. Joy and pain are mysteries that we cannot refrain from trying to fathom when once we have been under their sway. Thenceforward, the inward side of our character alone interests us, and our reflections always revert to what is passing within ourselves.

"Like all those who have tasted of the true passion, and who have dreamt intoxicating visions beneath its fatal upas shade, none of the exterior aims of life stirred me, and all the interests of mankind only drew from me a smile of scorn. The fallen angels in the midst of the joys of the world

yearned for paradise. But a man who grieves for heaven that he has lost is not only sad, but he despises all things implacably. He passes in the crowd, but without mixing with it; he roughly pushes through. Weariness, lazily installed upon the tortured brow, as if in a deserted pandemonium, causes sharp scorn to fall upon the lips and disappear. That is bad, Albany, for such is not just. The mind has so whispered long before our will has acted in conformity with the noble rigour of reason. Nevertheless, as life only seemed to me to be beautiful on the condition of its being a perpetual sacrifice, perhaps in spite of rebellious instinct might I have entered upon one of those active careers which I judged from such an elevated standpoint. But I had sufficient devotion to put forward without crossing the threshold of my door. God had given me two children.

"My friend, let man exaggerate his power or no, he is but a solitary individual, and consequently the sphere of his duties is a narrow one. If you are told the contrary, believe it not. I will go so far as to say that we have only one duty to perform in this world. On the other hand, action is man's true grandeur. By reason of the beauty of what strong will can accomplish, it becomes the

conqueror of thought. That is why I did not wholly and solely give myself up to those meditations concerning myself of which the charm is understood by all those who possess the experience of life. So I became active, and not in a wide circle where I should have weakened my necessary duties by multiplying them around me, but only in the just limits of my strength. I had two daughters. I thought of their future, and gave myself up to them. But it is a difficult feat, and well worth the attempt, to bring up two girls when we intend that they shall steer clear of the reefs on which their mothers have been shipwrecked.

"A man brings himself up alone, but if there exists a hackneyed truth, it is that woman is endowed with greater sensibility and has less means of resistance than man. Society, built up by men, throws females naked among countless suits of armour, against which they press their bodies with the infinite tenderness of their souls, but which wound and crush them. Our costumes have changed, but not our way of living. Upon our hands, washed with almond-paste and covered by white kid gloves, there is an iron gauntlet, I assure you. You cannot see it, but it is there all the same. If you do not believe me, look at the mark

on the bleeding wrists of the daughters. It is by education, Albany, that we can guarantee the frail destiny of woman—not from suffering, for oft-times pain makes more perfect, but from degrading humiliation. Such is my task, friend, in this world, where I am forced to live out my life, no longer having to make anybody happy.

"Yseult often said that the love of a child was no more eternal than any other affection, and I dare not say she was mistaken. The finest affections die out, so why shall not those also abandon us which are only the ornaments of life and do not destroy? But, if I cease to love my daughters as I tired of their mothers, the idea of duty will prevent me from turning away from them as did Yseult; and my girls, Jeanne and Marie, will always find a father in me, whether my heart beats beneath their caresses or feels nothing more.

"As for my wife, what can I do for her? I cannot even lie to her. She would not believe me. Besides, I have sworn to God to be faithful and sincere, and if the first oath was impious, the second was not so; for man can always be truthful—the one object of his life, solemnly subscribed once for all—and it was by remaining sincere with Camilla that I was to expiate my former falsity. I

did not even bestow brotherly caresses upon her. Would they not have appeared to her to be the most cruel irony? Since her mother's death, on that last day when she was jealous and implacable, her passionate disposition and stormy soul have given way. I never thought she would have become what she is now. I let her retire within herself, and filled up the emptiness of my days in looking after little Jeanne—Yseult's daughter—who had no mother, while the daughter of Camilla had. I was cruel, Albany, I know it; but I had my duty to fulfil towards my child. Had I acted otherwise, might not I have been more cruel still?

"My dear André, I tremble as I lay bare to you the bitter mysteries of my domestic life; my isolation in the married state, with wounded love groaning or eating itself out in silence, and our miserable delicacy which causes us to suffer inwardly in the face of the tortures of which we are the cause, and which increases instead of appeasing them. You never need to know these arid details, and my destiny remains the same for you as for the heart which is bound up in yours. May your fair Paule, to whom you have given life for life, never have to suffer the pangs of Camilla. May she never learn by her example what the unfortunate woman

never says. Now you understand why she never replied with fervour to the politeness of your amiable wife. She is a happy woman; therefore, almost an enemy. Alas! we are all like that when we are in pain. If she made up her mind to go and see you and Paule, I do not doubt but what the sight of your domestic happiness would plunge her into most horrible anguish. When I go to visit you, Albany, I, who love no more, and who try to be austere, do you know that I never leave you without being deeply stirred? In that union of wedlock, in the contemplation of the most wayward, superficial appearance of happy love, there is something that speaks in eloquent and holy language to our deceived desires. They are awakened and set to work to tear at their former prey, as if we were some new quarry to be killed again!

"At that moment, the slightest physical detail becomes redoubtable. There is not one but what is an opportunity for creating pain. With you, Albany, all is pure, all is calm, all breathes peace in tenderness; everything is in harmony with your love. When I approach and pass the threshold of that portal where the knocker glitters in the sun, and has never felt heavy to the hand of the man

who sought asylum there; when I pass between those two columns where is seated the pair of white greyhounds, sculptured faithfully with their wiry frames and pointed muzzles, symbolising fidelity and vigilance, it seems to me at once that the sky is of a brighter blue, and that the air is sweeter than at the Château of the Willows. Your elegant and modest dwelling is so simple, so small, and so full of grace, with its amber-hued vines creeping round about it, like capricious folds of a scarf, that one would wish to crawl within like a vagrant cur, and crouch down to be happy. I feel that life is enjoyed there, and jealously guarded within, as it ought to be; so that nothing can escape from those who profit by its sweetness, resembling the rivulet that runs beneath your fig-trees, whose broad leaves jealously protect it, as if the clouds, as they mirror themselves there, could steal any of it! And if one mounts the steps and enters the drawing-room, everywhere are more balmy traces, more marked signs of that happiness lacking in my house. You are chatting, and regretfully have to break off. I see Paule with her beautiful arms round her harp, the instrument that women clasp to their breasts to play, and whose pure tones bring tears to your eyes and make one hunger after hap-

piness. Or else I surprise her on your knees, André, and your head has usurped the resting-place of the musical instrument, while you both are looking at your little son learning to walk. Oh, this life of intimacy! how poignant is it for me to gaze upon! But not a sigh escaped from my breast. Did I not possess great self-restraint, Albany? Is it not true that you have never had to say to Paule, 'Let us hide our love from him; we hurt his feelings'? In the presence of such fresh and smiling pictures, did I not remain impassible? So much so, good and happy couple, that when I had taken my stick and left the corner of the hearth where I had passed my day, you never guessed that I carried these pictures away in my heart to ornament with bitter comparisons the empty walls of my vast and sad dwelling.

"Camilla must not die through seeing this, and at any rate she would suffer too much, without a doubt. Therefore, excuse her—you and Paule. You may have already noticed that she was to be pitied. Her sombre bearing speaks for her. Last winter, in Paris, at the few parties to which she went, and where you met her, she had a downcast look as if she feared that some one might read her

thoughts. What a contrast she made to your wife, with her swarthy pallor and her prematurely withered look, while Paule was radiant in her sweet rosy whiteness, her dead-gold hair and the halo of happiness gloriously encircling her brow. As I contemplated them both, I thought of the inequality of fate, and understood it no better than before.

"But must I confess it to you, André, my generosity that had its ups and downs, its good and bad days, did not have the same empire upon my life as that of pity on the existence of Yseult. In this, man is inferior to woman. Who can tell, even, if I should have been capable of so much before Camilla's *accouchement,* and the change it brought about in her at that period? She gave me a daughter whom I called Marie, and who very much resembles in form and feature the girl I had with Yseult. You can judge for yourself of this extraordinary likeness, my friend, for during the last eighteen months it has become more accentuated. Twins could not be more alike than these two little girls, and anyone could be mistaken—even Camilla and I!—and take one for the other, were it not for a mark that Nature has placed so as not to permit us to be deceived. She has caused

Yseult's daughter to be born with white hair, a sign of the old age of the mother left upon the forehead of the babe. We thought the growing locks might become fair, but as you view their long thick curls, full of life and energy, you become certain their colour will never change. Snow has fallen upon the bloom of spring, and will remain there without melting. When for the first time Camilla perceived on the poor, little, pure brow the innocently accusing hair that recalled terrible memories, the unfortunate woman turned away with convulsive horror, which lasted long. But one day—God knows with what effort—she succeeded in conquering it. Neither you nor your Paule, Albany, were ever able to notice that Camilla kissed with less tenderness the white head than the golden one. Never have you seen any difference in the caresses that she gives to both. Never have you thought of, or even suspected, the mystery of the birth we have been able to hide from society that would have jeered at it. Camilla—too jealous Camilla—in spite of the love that she still feels for me, has never once been false to herself. That is because, Albany, pity has at last been born in her; pity, the inheritance of her mother; pity, stronger than the love she has for me, and which

perhaps may soon fade; that unalienable pity which, when all sentiment and passion is mowed down in women's hearts, is of all their feelings—WHAT NEVER DIES!"

THE END.